NARRATIVES OF SPACE AND PLACE
IN THREE WORKS BY NAKAGAMI KENJI

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Nakagami’s Style


Nakagami Kenji (1946-1992) gives one the impression that, when he writes, he prefers to tear things apart, perhaps because he finds it easier to rend rather than to create; or perhaps, as his blunt words above would lead one to believe, like a boy frustrated with his toys, he just gets a thrill out of bashing things to pieces. In either case, his tendency to dismantle is interesting considering he grew up in a time when Japan had to rebuild itself from the devastation of the Pacific War.

Nakagami’s efforts to batter and destroy everything often manifest themselves in scenes of brutality and violence, and extend down to his very sentence structure, which strikes the reader like the jabs of a boxer: compact and powerful. “Short, savage sentences are one of the signatures of Nakagami Kenji’s prose style,” Nina Cornyetz writes, “his narratives abound with abbreviated distillations of event, emotion, and thought into shortened, staccato, and stressed syllables.” Such violence has an undeniable power, but proves simultaneously disturbing.

Eve Zimmerman additionally points out that Japanese critics often use the word uzuku (“tingle” or “throb”) in the description of the young Nakagami’s fiction, a characteristic of his prose that carries over to his later works as well. Zimmerman herself speaks glowingly of Nakagami’s writing style, seeing it, in contrast to Nakagami himself,
as exhibiting a power to create and shape: “Rooted in the world, Nakagami’s fiction nevertheless transcends realism. Through bursts of lyricism and dazzling rhythms, Nakagami transforms unbearable pain into poetry and forges a fictional voice that astounds with its range and its complexity.” What both scholars, Comyetz and Zimmerman, agree on is the presence of a certain vivacity and poetic quality in Nakagami’s work.

Karatani Kōjin, in line with Zimmerman’s statement that Nakagami transcends realism, comments that as a writer, Nakagami’s sentences “are indistinct and his plots obscure. But this is not a problem of quality…. What distinguishes Nakagami’s sentences is a certain perspective, one different from narrative writers or writers of realism, a dynamic multifaceted-ness.” In contrast to realism as a literary movement that sought to capture social conditions, objects, or actions as they actually exist or existed, critics like Karatani discuss Nakagami as a shōsetsuka (fiction writer) in the truest sense of the term. This stress on fiction comes up again and again in critical scholarship on Nakagami, first evident in Niwa Fumio’s commentary on Nakagami’s Akutagawa Prize-winning novella Misaki (The Cape, 1976), when he writes that Nakagami has “recovered what present-day Japanese fiction (shōsetsu) has lost sight of—the fiction (shōsetsu).” Although known predominantly as a burakumin (outcast) writer, Nakagami never writes on the buraku per se—he uses the trope of the roji (alley)—and his stories, rather than depict the discrimination against the burakumin, instead depict discrimination as a system.

The roji and the landscape of Kumano, more than a simple setting, constitute a significant part of his project as a writer, and their importance cannot be overestimated. They comprise a marginalized space, but also a space that marginalizes: the system of
discrimination mentioned above. As such, both the attitudes that the characters display towards this aggregate space, and the attitude the narrator as author displays towards it vary between one of venomousness and longing. This thesis will explore the paradox inherent in this attribute of Nakagami’s work, in terms of the theoretical concepts of both space and place in three texts: *Misaki* (The Cape, 1976), “Garyūsan” (Garyū Mountain, 1977-1978), and “Wara no ie” (House of Straw, 1978). All three exemplify such a contradictory space, and their location at two different points in Nakagami’s body of literature allows one to trace this space’s development, from its initial stages to its end.

1.2 Literature Review

Altogether Nakagami left behind enough poems, short stories, novels, and essays to fill fifteen volumes, and their place in recent Japanese literature continues to be explored. At present, he is relatively well-known in Western English-language scholarship, but the study of his work began only a few years after his death, no doubt spurred by his rapid canonization in Japan. Nevertheless, study on him has so far produced only two small translated collections: Andrew Rankin’s *Snakelust* and Eve Zimmerman’s *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto.* Fortunately, critical work on Nakagami has advanced much further, with essays available by North American scholars Nina Cornyetz, Anne McKnight, Livia Monnet, Alan Tansman, and Eve Zimmerman; and British scholars such as Steven Dodd and Mark Morris.

Western scholarship on Nakagami in general, and American scholarship in particular, tends to focus on those texts that resemble *setsuwa* (parable), in contrast to Japanese scholars who valorize those Nakagami stories referred to as his “*roji* narratives.”
"Akiyuki texts" (because of the principal character). Nina Cornyetz has written on this
division in her book *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words: Phallic Fantasy and Modernity in Three Japanese Writers*, and posits that the socio-cultural and political discourses
reproduced in the “aestheticism” of each group (Japan and America) is responsible for
the foregrounding of Nakagami’s *setsuwa* works in the West and his Akiyuki narratives
in Japan.⁹

In her chapters on Nakagami in *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*, Cornyetz
explores some of the *setsuwa* stories from a feminist perspective, examining such issues
as gender and the portrayal of the body. Interestingly enough, this feminist focus
represents another division between the Japanese and Western study of Nakagami.
Karatani Kōjin in particular has noted this intriguing difference, discussing how, at least
within America, scholars of Nakagami tend to be women and, further, can be categorized
as feminists.¹⁰ Cornyetz writes that “in the American academy a contemporary
enthusiasm for overt assaults on normative gendered and sexual performances—assaults
that spill over to affect writing itself—appears to engage feminist’s attention and to
underlie their interest in the noncanonical narratives.”¹¹ All of Nakagami’s work deals
with gender, assaults on it, and they deal with issues of lineage, both matrilineal and
patrilineal, but the Akiyuki texts take on the latter more blatantly, including the narratives
of modernization and modernity, all of which would appear to, as the *setsuwa*-like texts
do for the American system, appeal strongly to the Japanese academy.

Like Cornyetz, Livia Monnet also tackles issues of gender and sexuality in her
two-part article on Nakagami “Ghostly Women, Displaced Femininities and Male Family
Romances: The Politics of Violence, Gender and Sexuality in Two Texts by Nakagami Kenji.\textsuperscript{12} In the first half she addresses the short story "Fushi" (The Immortal, 1980) as a rewriting of both the pre-modern and modern portrayals of the \textit{hijiri} (itinerant preachers and exorcists). Conventional texts depict the \textit{hijiri} as a healer and an important figure in Japanese folk religion, but Nakagami’s \textit{hijiri} is an impostor, a rapist, and a murderer that deconstructs that traditional image. In the second part of her article she explores the intertextual aspects of Nakagami’s short story “Jūryoku no miyako” (Gravity’s Capital, 1981) in order to reconstruct what was repressed: a male family romance between Nakagami, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1886-1965) and Orikuchi Shinobu (1887-1953).

"Jūryoku no miyako" feeds off texts by both Tanizaki and Orikuchi and a ménage-à-trois among characters in the story mimics a similar relationship among the three writers. The story then, in Monnet’s interpretation, becomes a “small imagined community of male homo-literary desire that continually threatens to usurp the place of the woman."\textsuperscript{13}

Anne McKnight has explored parallels between Nakagami and the American Nobel laureate William Faulkner (1897-1962), as well as writing a brief introduction to Nakagami in \textit{The Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literatures}\.\textsuperscript{14} Like McKnight, Mark Morris’s article on Nakagami also looks at his similarities to Faulkner, not so much technically speaking, in terms of style, but rather in their shared characteristics as “Southern writers,” that is to say as writers born in a peripheral region who gave voice to that region.\textsuperscript{15} Like Gabriel García Márquez (1928-), another Nobel laureate who read Faulkner, Nakagami creates a community of the defeated, one that has as its center a domineering figure of patriarchy. In \textit{Chi no hate shijō no toki} (The Ends of the Earth and the Sublime Time, 1983), this figure, part of the Oedipal narrative of
modernity, self-destructs, according to Morris, into a post-Oedipal (i.e., post-modern) narrative.

Alan Tansman, in his article “History, Repetition, and Freedom in the Narratives of Nakagami Kenji,” performs a wide overview of many of the themes produced in the Akiyuki trilogy. Like many Japanese scholars who focus on these narratives and other *roji* texts, Tansman examines Nakagami’s struggle with *monogatari* (narrative), which, in Nakagami’s conception, stands as a normative and pervasive force. In the essay Tansman discusses how Nakagami struggled against the narrative of modern literary tradition and struggled to overcome it.

Eve Zimmerman also delves into topics along these same lines. Perhaps the foremost scholar on Nakagami in the United States, she has written a biographical article on him in *Modern Japanese Writers*, a chapter in the book *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, and a forthcoming book on Nakagami. In her chapter in *Ōe and Beyond*, she argues that Nakagami uses repetition in his stories as a means of returning to various mythic archetypes of narrative, such as Cain and Abel, and Oedipus. Then, by “doubling the mythic archetype back upon itself and using it as a tool of liberation,” Zimmerman writes, “Nakagami finds a solution to the dilemma of repetition.”

In addition to these works, Zimmerman’s translation of select Nakagami stories—*The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*—also contains a preface and afterword that provide useful biographical information on Nakagami, as well as a critical overview of his career as a writer. Andrew Rankin, the only other person to have translated some of Nakagami’s work, has also written a biographical piece on Nakagami for the journal *Japan Quarterly*. 
In his article “Japan’s Private Parts: Place as a Metaphor in Nakagami Kenji’s Works,” Steven Dodd argues that Nakagami’s texts highlight repressed elements of Japanese culture, including discrimination against the buraku people and misogyny expressed through sexual violence. While Nakagami explores marginality, the “private parts” of a society, his texts also display a masculine insecurity, a need to dominate over women. Dodd concludes that “the role of the female character seems mostly a means for the male figure to work out his own problems.” This article, along with Monnet’s and Morris’s, appears in the August 1996 feature issue of Japan Forum entitled “Towards Nakagami,” which provided one of the founding blocks for study of Nakagami in the West and is a seminal work for English-language study of Nakagami today.

Japanese scholarship on Nakagami has had a sizeable head start on Western English-language scholarship, starting in the 1970s, and thus cannot be summarized succinctly. Major scholars on his work include Asada Akira, Iguchi Tokio, Karatani Kojin, Takazawa Shūji, Yomota Inuhiko, and Watanabe Naomi. Nina Cornyetz has drawn attention to the fact that most Japanese Nakagami scholars tend to be men, and, informed by an ambivalent masculinist politics, they generally do not focus on gender issues. “Ambivalent,” she says, “because any celebration of Nakagami’s work must accept an assault on gender constructs.” However, the Akiyuki narratives provide in her mind the gentlest “forays into nonnative gender and sexual performances,” in contrast to the setsuwa texts, which are overt in their assaults, and with which Cornyetz and others primarily concern themselves.

Part of the tension between the two approaches resides in Nakagami’s portrayal of violence against women, which occurs so frequently that one almost wonders if he were
not a misogynist. This violence, explored in American and British scholarship, often appears to be excused by Japanese critics as violence perpetrated against the pre-modern tradition, which has been traditionally associated with the feminine through such genres as the monogatari (narrative).\textsuperscript{24} Nevertheless, both bodies of scholarship complement one another nicely in that they cover different aspects of Nakagami’s work in equally different ways.

1.3 Summary of the Chapters

The present thesis will place itself mid-way between the two worlds, examining three of the Akiyuki texts—Misaki (The Cape, 1975), “Garyūsan” (Garyū Mountain, 1977-1978), and “Wara no ie” (House of Straw, 1978)—and focus in on one of the topics that many Nakagami scholars have examined and continue to examine: the recurrent setting of the roji and the surrounding Kumano landscape. However, I will explore this geographical topography using theoretical concepts of space and place.

Prior to a treatment of the stories above, it is first necessary to examine a series of essays Nakagami published in the literary journal Kokubungaku entitled “Monogatari no keifu” (The Genealogy of the Monogatari, 1979-1984), in which Nakagami traces elements of monogatari in certain Japanese writers, and in so doing puts forth his own notion of monogatari as an oppressive discourse. Following this, I will explore in the third chapter Nakagami’s (re)creation of a literary space (i.e., the roji and the Kumano landscape) that, from a textual standpoint, at once counters and supports this repressive monogatari as system. In the fourth chapter, the discussion will proceed to specific places in the stories that are intimately connected with originary points in the histories of

8
Nakagami’s protagonists. When the protagonists return to these places they recover the inception of their own narrative, unearth its structure, only to have it well up out of the past and overcome them.

I conclude from these two chapters that Nakagami wields space and place as means of usurping and reinforcing narrative, a paradoxical project that closes each text on a score of ambiguous and tenebrous tones. Still, the reader can draw certain conclusions from the path these three narratives take and the moment they build towards, even if it is incomplete. In the fifth chapter then I will examine Nakagami’s deconstruction of the space of the roji and the surrounding land, and the new spatial articulation that comes in on its heels.

1.4 Misaki, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie”

Because of their vital location in Nakagami’s oeuvre, these three works act as useful instruments to dissect the concepts and ideas discussed above. With his novella Misaki Nakagami became, in 1976, the first writer born after World War II to win the Akutagawa Prize. Acclaimed for its depiction of a peripheral community and also criticized for its complex and often confusing familial relationships, Misaki introduced Akiyuki, a character that would appear in countless other stories and in other guises, named and unnamed. The novella catalyzed Nakagami’s career and one could even say gave him direction as a writer: the Akiyuki trilogy is the most discussed of Nakagami’s fiction, at least by Japanese critics, and Misaki stands at its head. The roji too, the literary topography so essential to any discussion of Nakagami, begins here. Although its
depiction in *Misaki* does not display the same complexity present in Nakagami’s later work, in considering the *roji*’s development, one must always start with *Misaki*.

Short stories like “Garyûsan” and “Wara no ie” are also, as Takazawa Shûji claims, important stories to the *roji* texts. In *Chi no hate shijô no toki* the *roji* is reduced to grasslands settled by squatters. Later novels such as *Nichirin no tsubasa* (*The Wings of the Sun*, 1984) and *Kiseki* (*Miracle*, 1988) then deal with the aftereffects of the *roji*’s destruction. The process of its destruction occurs over an extended period of time in the Akiyuki texts, but it gets underway in these two short stories—“Garyûsan” and “Wara no ie”—which focus on the leveling of the Garyû Mountain, a mountain located in the middle of Nakagami’s fictional city of Komoriku, dividing the *roji* from the rest of the city. The city government, landowners, and developers eye the mountain greedily—if removed, its land and the land of the *roji* would represent a veritable fortune. Once the mountain has been demolished, the narrative then opens up, not the possibility, but the inevitability of the destruction of the *roji*: one can begin to see Nakagami’s overall narrative coming together in this deconstructive act.

Nakagami himself did not believe that narrative or *monogatari* could truly be overturned, only shifted. Whether he succeeds in even that much in his literary project is open to debate, but his theoretical stance as a critic does not necessarily have to accord with his endeavors or even his production as a writer. Instead, what Nakagami seems to have left us are texts that offer no easy answers, but demand constant exploration and evaluation, a level of critical awareness that forces us, the reader, to confront issues we had not considered or had perhaps not wanted to consider.
Chapter 2
Down the Ever-Winding Narrative Path

2.1 Introduction

“Monogatari no keifu,” a series of essays published in the literary journal Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū, presents many challenges to those trying to tease from it Nakagami’s view of monogatari (narrative). The series of essays are, first, criticism of the literary and/or scholarly figures Satō Haruo (1892-1964), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Ueda Akinari (1734-1809), Orikuchi Shinobu, and Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986); and second, a means for Nakagami to voice his opinions on monogatari.1 In the essays Nakagami also reveals a great deal about himself, his own biases and favoritisms, not unusual considering how personal his polemic becomes. Here, only the first two essays will be examined, those on Satō Haruo and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō. While I will address Nakagami’s criticism of these two writers, the primary concern is to achieve, through the critical lens of the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), a clear understanding of Nakagami’s version of monogatari since it by no means resembles the traditional conception.

2.2 The Problem of Narrative

In its strictest sense the term monogatari, typically translated as “tale” or “narrative,” is used to refer to works predominantly of prose written in the Heian (794-1185) and Muromachi Periods (1392-1573), the most famous example of which is Murasaki Shikibu’s (ca. 973?-1014?) Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji, ca. 1010).2 In
a more general definition, however, *monogatari* is taken to mean prose work in which the narrator speaks as though detached from the events he or she is relating, much like one would imagine a storyteller relating a tale to an audience today, but even this broader explanation does not accord with Nakagami’s view.

"*Monogatari* is present everywhere and in every thing,” Nakagami writes, avoiding the categories in which the two definitions above attempt to place the term. One should also add a temporal dimension to Nakagami’s statement, since he frequently states that *monogatari* has been present since the time of Emperor Jimmu, the legendary first sovereign of Japan. This image of an ever-present *monogatari* worming its way through history has in it more than a hint of what contemporary theorists in the West term “narrative,” and this is the sense with which Nakagami wields the term. Narrative can exist in all manner of things, it is no longer “specifically a literary form: it is found, to be sure, in novels and epic poems, but it is also found in movies and comic strips and ballets and puppet shows and anecdotes at cocktail parties.” It is a “contentless form that our perception imposes on the raw flux of reality, giving it, even as we perceive, the comprehensible order we call experience. This is not to make the conventional claim that we make up stories about the world to understand it, but the much more radical claim that the world comes to us in the shape of stories.” Narrative is a force that permeates every aspect of life much like the contemporary view of language, considered to be “a sprawling limitless web where there is a constant interchange and circulation of elements, where none of the elements is absolutely definable and where everything is caught up and traced through everything else.” “*Monogatari no keifu*” came at a point when such ideas
had already had an opportunity to suffuse the critical air, and Nakagami appears to have taken a deep breath before setting out to put together his view of monogatari.

Within these essays Nakagami uses the term “law and system” (hō / seido) interchangeably with monogatari, and employs it so often that the words merge into what could be a mantra for the series of essays. The “law and system,” since it is equated with narrative or monogatari, can also be found in anything and everything, throughout time.

For instance, the above quote of Nakagami’s continues:

Reality is truly stifling for any one who once recognizes the existence of the law and system. Take music that you just happen to hear for instance. From popular songs to Mozart, all of it exists within the framework of monogatari. It isn’t that Mozart is a genius; there is simply a law or system that envelopes music. The reason we find it beautiful or moving is because our sensibilities have adapted to the law or system. 8

In Nakagami’s view we adapt (jun ‘nō) naturally to all sorts of narratives, the acceptance of Mozart as a genius only one such example. What he advocates is an awareness of such a narrative’s existence, an understanding that “reality comes to us in the form of its stories.” 9 With that awareness, one should then be capable of unseating such structures.

In Nakagami’s opinion, Satō Haruo has attained just such a level of perspicacity.

In his discussion of Satō, Nakagami’s tone also has a mix of intimacy and irritation. Satō, like Nakagami, was born in Shingū, and Nakagami finds in him characteristics that only those from Shingū can possess, what Nakagami terms “the mark of Kishū, the mark of Kumano” (Kishū no kouin, Kumano no kouin). 10 But Nakagami finds this mark to be weak (usui) in Satō. 11 In other words, Satō does not embrace his heritage strongly enough for Nakagami.

The essay on Satō opens with a discussion on the High Treason Incident, which occurred towards the end of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) in 1910, when Satō was only
In the incident, a plot to assassinate the emperor was foiled and a number of people were rounded up and arrested. Six of those implicated in the conspiracy were located in Shingū, among them a socialist named Ōishi Seinosuke (1867-1911) who was soon executed for his role. This had a tremendous impression on Satō, forcing him, in Nakagami’s words, to convert (tenkō).

Satō’s conversion is tied up with what Nakagami means when he refers to realizing the existence of monogatari or narrative, its pervasive nature, and its ability to shape the perception of reality. Nakagami writes:

Conversion means, for the time being hiding, within himself, the fact that he [Satō] came from Shingū. At a time in this man of letters’ life when he had yet to accumulate many experiences, in his home of Shingū which he had just left behind, there was a plot to assassinate the emperor and several people were arrested … Satō was, regarding Kishū, in the same predicament as Hakai’s Ushimatsu. If he opened his mouth to speak about Kishū, the various narratives would have ruined him. “Conversion” is the discovery of this.

For Nakagami, Kishū, the peninsula where Shingū is located, has been a “nation of darkness” (yami no kokka). He further describes it as “a country that was created under the gaze of the defeated, the ones who were looked down upon, the crippled, the grotesque, and the dead.” In Satō’s case, the 1910 act of treason allows him to realize the existence of this ongoing struggle between the nation, represented here by the Meiji government but which has existed since the inception of Japanese history, and Kishū, the nation of darkness. He becomes a writer who now possesses a “hyper-sensitivity to narrative” (monogatari e no kabin), or what amounts to an awareness of the ongoing conflict between national, normative forces and the suppressed people, the marginal forces found in a place like Shingū.
One of the key facets of Nakagami’s Satō essay concerns the government of Japan as a narrative. This tale has its beginnings in Emperor Jimmu and continues on, winding down through history to the Meiji polity of modern times and the military government that soon followed. All of these governments as narratives, what Nakagami also calls “visible narratives” (kashi no monogatari), seek to repress the narrative as embodied by Kishn. This dynamic between the nation and a smaller nation parallels the concept of center and margin. Mikhail Bakhtin discusses something similar throughout his body of work, including in his concept of language and the notion of heteroglossia, and in order to better interpret and understand Nakagami’s position, it is to Bakhtin’s work that I now turn.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas on language can be seen to match up nicely with the view of narrative that Nakagami voices. Generally speaking, language is abstractly viewed as a whole, unitary entity, but in Bakhtin’s account it is dynamic and multifaceted. He sees language as pulled in two opposite directions: “centripetally, towards the unitary center provided by a notion of ‘national language’; and centrifugally, towards the various languages which actually constitute the apparent but false unity of a national language.” Bakhtin terms the latter heteroglossia, a word that literally means “multispeckedness.” The two aspects of language, the normative language and the peripheral ones, exist together and in a constant state of tension because each utterance must place itself in relation to its overarching language in addition to the languages of the heteroglossia. Also, each member of the heteroglossia necessarily has its own set of rules, or as the Bakhtin scholar Michael Holquist writes, “Heteroglossia is a way of conceiving the world as made up of a rolling mass of languages, each of which has its own distinct
formal markers. These features are never purely formal, for each has associated with it a set of distinct values and suppositions.\textsuperscript{22} All of this applies to Nakagami’s version of narrative, at least in the view he presents in the essay on Satō and explicates further on when he moves to Tanizaki Jun’ichirō. Just as the overarching narrative embodied by government has its own set of values and suppositions, so too does the narrative of Kishū. Nakagami allows for this by also terming Kishū a nation, albeit a nation of darkness. The larger visible nation, a normative one, and the liminal Kishū exist in tension, and so does Nakagami’s conception of narrative, with one narrative trying to sublimate or, alternately, trying to suppress another, a narrative of the heteroglossia.

Like Bakhtin when he talks about heteroglossia, Nakagami has an evaluative accent when discussing Kishū. One could say Bakhtin is enamored with the idea of multiplicity, especially the ever-changing nature of the peripheral languages, the incompleteness of their development, and in a similar way Nakagami valorizes Kishū as a nation of darkness, what he describes as a land for lepers (raisha) and the vile (sensha). He proudly proclaims himself an equal of their scorned and detested ranks. Bakhtin’s heteroglossia renders the tension between one normative set of laws and system and another non-normative set understandable in Nakagami’s political sense, and it proves helpful as well when Nakagami progresses to his discussion on Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, where he further fills out his definition of monogatari.
2.3 Taking on the “Pig of Narrative”

When Nakagami turns to Tanizaki his essay resembles more of an attack than a critical commentary. He rails against him, calling him all manner of names from wrongdoer (hanzaisha), idiot (hakuchi), to the very simple but always effective, pig (buta). In the opening paragraph of his essay, he makes clear the tone he will take: “Here, I do not feel like joining the chorus of homages that many critics and writers pay to Tanizaki—here, I consider Tanizaki an enemy.” The only thing he seems willing to allow is that Tanizaki has a natural talent (sainō) for writing—it does, in fact, overflow from the page according to Nakagami. His insults can be seen as humorous on one level, but their unrelenting nature also makes it hard to take what Nakagami has to say seriously; the points he brings up on narrative are buried under the strength of the curses. Eve Zimmerman justifiably calls his tone “bombastic.” In one section, where he quiets his incendiary tone slightly, Nakagami writes:

People have known of the existence of narrative, and more specifically, narrative’s laws and system, ever since the time when people spoke of the narrative’s ancestors, of Taketori monogatari or Ise monogatari. Those laws and system are far more oppressive than the laws and system under the fearful rule of an autocracy. Jun’ichirō feigns ignorance of that. Of course, that doesn’t concern me. What I feel when I look at Jun’ichirō’s move to the Kansai area or at his use of the Kansai dialect within his stories is not that he despised the laws and system of narrative, the fearful regime of narrative, but rather that he liked it and he willingly lived under it.

Nakagami’s language here regarding narrative is political as before, only now his metaphor of narrative as the Meiji government shifts to narrative as the Japanese regime that came to power in the 1930s, with one key difference: Nakagami makes the bold statement that it is more oppressive than any such government. Like most hyperboles this appears to be more for shock-value than anything else, but whereas before he troped

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narrative as government, here he gives examples of other narratives or actual monogatari—Taketori monogatari (The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter) and Ise monogatari (The Tales of Ise) — which allows the reader to situate his definition in literary terms, rather than solely political ones. This falls in line with Nakagami’s statement that narrative is a ubiquitous structure that has existed and does still exist in many things, government only one aspect. Still, the same tension that exists in government between the center and margin, self and other, also exists in the literary narrative.

In his discussion on the literary narrative, Nakagami specifies two types, drawing a division between those located after Genji monogatari and those prior to it. Both versions have in them the domineering narrative system that Nakagami speaks of in government, but with the pre-Genji tales there is an important difference: these only “have in them the germ of the law and system” (hō ya seido no me wa aru), or, in other words, the beginnings of the narrative structure and therefore only the potential to turn into the oppressive force Nakagami discusses. At the same time, because of its formative state, the pre-Genji narrative is also capable of moving in the opposite direction and becoming something different. This parallels the distinction Nakagami makes earlier in the Satō essay, when he paints the nation-state as an oppressive narrative and the Kishū nation as a non-normative one. Narrative or monogatari, then, cannot be the categorically oppressive force he initially seems to paint it as because, once again, Kishū, though a non-normative force, is nonetheless a narrative. In discussing the pre-Genji monogatari Nakagami cites Utsuho monogatari (The Tale of the Cavern), a mid-Heian Period tale of unknown authorship, and writes:

What I believe is present in the narrative Utsuho and absent in the narrative Genji is the question towards the germ of meaning. What makes parents, parents? What
makes children, children? The ghostly zither (*koto*) that sounds out, shaking heaven and earth, asks and answers the question: what is sound? With *Genji* the relationship between parent and child is rendered through and reduced to the laws and system of the regent government; dynamism is lost in the process. One can then take the Shining Prince Genji as a product of the law and system itself.  

In *Utsuho* the mythical origins of the hero are evidence of what Nakagami refers to as “dynamism”: Nakatada, the principal hero of *Utsuho*, is raised in a hollow tree, off the nuts and berries that monkeys and bears bring him. This is in contrast to Genji, a son of the emperor, reared in the imperial palace, who seeks to rise to the pinnacle of the system from within it. Nakatada, meanwhile, is an illegitimate child who is estranged from his father, and, in spite of entering into the Heian aristocratic system from outside it, manages to succeed within it. One of Nakagami’s qualms with *Genji* is not only that it abandons this use of myth, but that, in containing itself to the regency system, it does not question the order of things and instead reinforces them, or, in Nakagami’s words, lays the law and system bare (*arawa ni suru*).  

With Bakhtin, the center and margin, also referred to as self and other, exist in a state of simultaneity. Because of this, they are not a typical binary opposition, but two forces that interact, or, in Bakhtin’s terms, they are two forces that communicate with each other in a dialogic relationship. For Nakagami, the post-*Genji* narrative and the narrative of central government pretend to speak with a single, monologic voice, oppressing the voice of the other. Nakagami sees *Genji* in particular as rejecting dynamism in favor of narrative contained to a unitary law and system (the regency system) while *Utsuho* unseats that system and affirms the existence of the other, the illegitimate child Nakatada. This speaks to what Nakagami believes to be one potential (and perhaps in his eyes, fundamental) function of narrative: to destabilize structures. In
this permutation of narrative, one can again see the interplay of center and margin at work, and Nakagami’s antipathy for anything that acknowledges the former without the latter.

That aversion continues to storm throughout his polemic, directing itself chiefly at Tanizaki, the topic of the essay, for his unquestioning compliance with such a domineering system. Near the end of the essay, Nakagami concludes that “Tanizaki was a racist. He held such consistently discriminatory views of the vile (sen naru mono), of the disfigured (ikei no mono) that I am left wondering why the campaigners who cry for an end to discrimination don’t rip his stories to pieces.”35 Tanizaki may praise shadows, but his shadows are those of traditional Japan that did not include, for instance, the shadows of Kumano, but actually worked to exclude them.36 Nakagami, so concerned with the marginal, thought of narrative in this way, as a deterministic structure that sought to consolidate a single, and thus false, voice, and in his own writings he sought to undermine it.

2.4 Conclusion: Monogatari and Genealogy

Nakagami’s vision of narrative is chimera-like, made up of various things at any one time. In the essays on Satō Haruo and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō in “Monogatari no keifu” it encapsulates government, nature, religion, and literature; further, narratives, particularly those that occupy a position of centrality, are almost always oppressive. Yet “authorship is a form of governance,” or at least Bakhtin sees it as such and perhaps Nakagami as well, meaning that the center is not necessarily something that should automatically be dismissed as egregious—like most things, it depends on what someone
makes of it. When “used well, [it] results in art; when used badly, it results in totalitarianism.” More often than not, narrative tends towards the latter in Nakagami’s opinion, but as a writer Nakagami also has the opportunity to alter that trend, to shape narrative into art, and as a writer who frequently put his own buraku history to work, he also has the chance to create narratives contra the repressive ones that have suffused Japanese history. Lisette Gebhart, who examines postwar Japan through the life of Nakagami, writes that:

Nakagami was influenced by [Bakhtin’s] works. He was especially fond of the notion of the ‘marginal’ and the ‘carnivalesque’, which he identified with Kumano. He regarded this landscape as a device to renew Japanese society through its carnivalesque energies. Writing about Kumano, which nearly became an obsession for Nakagami, meant for him to perform rituals of inversion, to create a new sort of monogatari (narrative), and to undermine both Japanese society and the literary scene.  

“Monogatari no keifu” can be seen as one of Nakagami’s exploratory steps in that direction, an endeavor to destabilize, as Gebhart writes, Japanese society and the literary scene. Eve Zimmerman calls the series of essays “a thinly disguised critique of Japan,” but Nakagami does not disguise anything; he is completely open with his attack. Keifu, “genealogy” or “lineage,” implies tracing one’s origins, and since lineage has conventionally been determined patrilineally, these essays also speak to more than an attempted inversion. Akiyuki (and the other characters that Nakagami spins out of him), struggles with his paternity, he attempts to come to grips with the enigma of his father and the blood they share. These were issues that Nakagami most likely had to deal with himself: he was not only an illegitimate child of his father, but in a sense, of postwar Japan as well. “Monogatari no keifu” is part of Nakagami’s struggle, part of the journey
he took to trace his ancestry as a writer, to locate his place in the tradition of Japanese literature, and in a larger sense, of narrative itself.
Chapter 3
The Ambivalence of Nakagami’s Space

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Conceptualizing Space

Many scholars who have studied space discuss how, in the relation between time and space, time has historically dominated, and the point has come to change that climate. Michel Foucault, for instance, has written that from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth space was considered “dead,” it was considered unchanging, in contrast to time which had the fecundity of life. He then predicts a correction to this trend: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.” In order to resuscitate the concept of space, geographers, philosophers, historians, literary critics, and others from all manner of disciplines have brought renewed focus to it. Foucault’s statement above captures the first beats of that pulse nicely.

Nakagami Kenji’s texts offer another potential resource for scholars to examine the concept of space. Yomota Inuhiko, in his book *Kishu to tensei: Nakagami Kenji* (High Birth and Re-birth: Nakagami Kenji), discusses how Nakagami’s stories, particularly the Akiyuki trilogy, repeat themselves, each story a critique of the one that came before it. Other scholars, such as Livia Monnet, echo these sentiments. Similarly, Nakagami’s stories continue to repeat the same space: in his *setsuwa* stories Nakagami utilizes the pre-modern landscapes of Kumano, and in the Akiyuki narratives he employs
the narrow, confining roji. In the case of the latter, he uses it so often that one scholar has commented that Nakagami’s obsession with this land in his works made her sick (unzari saserareru). Both offer another means of exploring many of Nakagami’s themes, but through a different point of entry into his world.

The roji appears early on in Nakagami’s fiction, most notably in Misaki (1976), but in comparison to works that followed it—Karekinada (1977) and stories such as “Garyūsan” (1977-1978) and “Wara no ie” (1978)—it seems an incomplete, formative space, in the same way that a character can appear when undeveloped. In line with Yomota’s thesis, each story Nakagami writes could be described as not only a critique of those preceding it, but as a reconsideration of the previous spatial representation. In the story arc of the Akiyuki narratives the roji undergoes many changes until it is eventually, in Chi no hate shijō no toki (1983), leveled as part of an urban revitalization project. Yet through all of its various interpretations, it remains a space that opposes and also reinforces Nakagami’s conception of monogatari as a monolithic, normative force. In “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie” the space of the roji, already a well-developed entity at this time in Nakagami’s corpus, is an ambivalent space, at once the space of monogatari and an abject space. Before continuing further, it is perhaps best to examine the concept of space to better understand where the epoch Foucault speaks of has led, and what the term space might have now come to connote.

“Space is everywhere in modern thought,” Nigel Thrift and Mike Crang write. As one of those terms caught in a trend of popular discourse, the word flows easily enough—using it makes one sound like the child in school who can wield the most current slang—but, when one pauses to consider it, it becomes an extremely difficult
concept to define. Graham Nerlich, one of the foremost contemporary philosophers on space, has written that:

It is easy to see why space is so problematic. On the one hand, we are drawn to make very powerful statements about it. Everything that is real has some spatial position. Space is infinitely large, infinitely penetrable and infinitely divisible. On the other, despite our confidence in these strong claims, space seems elusive to the point of eeriness ... Though being spatial is a mark of the real, space itself seems, paradoxically perhaps, unreal[,] a mere nothing.  

The picture that Nerlich paints of space in his book *The Shape of Space* relies much on modern physics, particularly Special and General Relativity. Space has long been associated with the field of physics and, perhaps more so, mathematics, represented as it is through equations and functions, and within them, variables, all of which make it hard to conceptualize, much less realize in any sort of theory. From mathematics “the modern field of inquiry known as epistemology has inherited and adopted the notion that the status of space is that of a ‘mental thing’ or ‘mental place.’”  

Epistemology has assumed the responsibility of bridging the gap between space as an abstraction and as reality, yet space seems never to have crossed over: understanding of it has, in fact, diversified; once that “mental thing” is in the “mental space” of the mind, it comes to mean different things to different people. Henri Lefebvre, in a statement widely quoted, writes: “We are forever hearing about the space of this and/or the space of that: about literary space, ideological spaces, the space of the dream, psychoanalytic topologies, and so on and so forth.”  

Lefebvre has termed this the fragmentation of space, stating that “the very multiplicity of these descriptions and sectionings makes them suspect.” While he sees this fragmentation as a problem, others, such as Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, see it as ineluctable, especially when each discipline will deal with space in its own way: the real problem for them concerns the use of the term space “with such abandon that its
meanings run into each other before they have been properly interrogated. As long as a person makes clear, from the start, what he or she means in invoking the term “space,” Crang and Thrift see no ethical problem, though, critically speaking, the theory will always lie open to disagreement and critique.

Although Foucault’s pronouncement above might register the excitement of a shift in thinking from temporality to spatiality, one must also note the impossibility of considering space without time. Although the two are often represented as a binary, each graphed along its own individual Cartesian axis, modern physics categorically altered this view such that people could no longer think of both space and time as universal, existing a priori and distinctly separate. These developments, which took place in the early twentieth century, have left an indelible stamp on thought: for instance, many geographers have stated there can be no serious consideration of time without space, nor space without time. Also, geography, particularly the field of human geography, takes space not as Euclidian geometry depicts it—an empty container which holds in its grasp people and objects—but “as a socially produced set of manifolds.” Though space appears to have certain objective qualities that can be fixed through scientific measurements of its dimensions (e.g., volume, area, direction, etc.), space also has certain subjective characteristics. J.E. Malpas, for instance, speaks of how space presents itself to a person, implying that each person can perceive it in different ways, yet, at the same time, he does not negate its objective qualities. David Harvey, too, in his The Condition of Postmodernity, insists that “we recognize the multiplicity of the objective qualities which space and time can express, and the role of human practices in their construction.” Harvey’s pluralistic view of space, which many thinkers echo, denotes it
as a process; space is formed through what Harvey calls, borrowing from Henri Lefebvre, "social practices." Both Harvey and Lefebvre operate from a socialist base and, accordingly, have a materialist perspective on space. For them “each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts.” That is to say that society produces its own conception of time and space, and it can do so through practices that “structure everyday reality and broader social and urban reality”; such practices “include routes and networks and patterns of interaction that link places set aside for work, play and leisure” or what could also be termed “practices of everyday life.”

Even the most mundane practices of everyday life can create space. For instance, Michel de Certeau, in his essay, “Walking in the City,” discusses how the practice of walking can create the urban space of the city: “The motions of walking are spatial creations,” he writes, “They link sites one to the other. Pedestrian motor functions thus create one of those ‘true systems whose existence actually makes the city’, but which ‘have no physical receivability’. They cannot be localized; they spatialize.” Elizabeth Grosz builds on this idea when she writes:

The subject’s relation to space and time is not passive: space is not simply an empty receptacle, independent of its contents; rather, the ways in which space is perceived and represented depend on the kinds of objects positioned ‘within’ it, and, more particularly, the kinds of relation the subject has to those objects … [S]pace does not become comprehensible to the subject by its being the space of movement; rather, it becomes space through movement, and as such, it acquires specific properties from the subject’s constitutive functioning in it.

This description of space as created, rather than existing a priori, as malleable, rather than rigidly playing the role of container, works as a springboard to examine Nakagami Kenji’s roji and other potential spaces of his texts. However, as Henri Lefebvre points out,
though social practices produce space, space also, in turn, produces society. Space may be produced but it is also a means of production and reproduction. Society seeks to perpetuate itself, its superstructure, and it can accomplish this through space, which, as a societal construction, should reflect society’s ideology. Space then becomes a source of power that, when tapped into, can in turn operate on the bodies moving through it.

3.1.2 The Space of the Roji

In discussing Misaki, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie,” I will discuss the space of the roji, an urban social space very much produced by those who live there and, at the same time, a space that in turn produces; and natural space consisting of the mountains, rivers, and ocean that encompass the nameless city in Misaki and the fictional city of Komoriku in “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie.”

The system of alleyways physically forms an interlocking matrix, in a way that mimics the relationships between the characters, both hermetically within each story and trans-textually between stories. The natural space, on the other hand, would appear to exist prior to any society and thus any sort of relations that could produce space. However, it is important to note that Nakagami describes it in gendered terms. While this practice is hardly uncommon in literature, Nakagami imbues it with characteristics of both genders, a coupling of male and female that could be said to be the start of a society—as Furuhashi Nobuyoshi notes, man and woman form the start of the family. One can describe the roji in similar terms, as a dual-gendered space akin to a hermaphroditic (parental) figure, or what Asada Akira has called a “polyssexual space” and Karatani Kōjin has referred to as a “polymorphous gender imaginary.”
Interestingly enough, with respect to the *roji*, numerous critics, including Asada and Karatani, equate the *roji* with the space of *monogatari*. For instance, Watanabe Naomi has written, “If we assume that Nakagami contributed a new constituent element to the history of how modern literature has represented the *buraku*, it is the revelation that the *roji* is a site of *monogatari*.” When one takes into account Nakagami’s own view of *monogatari* as an oppressive force (“law/system”), this would appear to contradict any notion of the *roji* as an abject space, but Nakagami has an acknowledged ambivalence on this topic. Nakagami is interested in “language—always and inseparably tied to the common man’s daily life, particularly the strange power of the entire Japanese language to draw you into the depths of ambiguity.” His obsession with the ambivalence inherent in language manifests itself (at least on one level) in the depiction of the *roji*. As he has stated, *monogatari* can be found in everything and the *roji* would appear to exemplify that, a site for the *buraku* people but also a site forced upon them. Like Nina Comyetz, one can only conclude that throughout the Akiyuki texts Nakagami tropes “the *roji* as an inverted and destabilized site of history and discrimination.” The space he constructs in *Misaki*, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie” is a dualistic one that constantly undermines itself, a space that acts to repress and also attempts to recover from acts of repression.
3.2 A History of Kumano

Before entering into a discussion on space within the three stories cited above, it would be beneficial to quickly examine the history of the area around Shingū, the basis for the setting in most of Nakagami’s work. Shingū, the inspiration for the urban city in many of the Akiyuki narratives, is historically located in the pre-modern Kumano region, an area formed by parts of present-day Wakayama, Nara, and Mie prefectures. Kumano, in the cultural imagination, was conceived of as a sacred place, a land where the dead resided (*shirei no komoru chi*). This belief is evident in Japanese literature as early as the *Nihon shoki* (The Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times, 720 AD) with the myth of Izanami and Izanagi. Both Izanami and Izanagi, female and male deities respectively, were charged by the gods with the task of bringing order to the world. When they descended from heaven, they became man and wife and Izanami gave birth to the islands of Japan, along with all their deities. However, in the process of giving birth to the fire god, Kagutsuchi no Kami, Izanami was burned alive; her body was interred in Kumano. This myth contributed to the conception of Kumano as an “other world” (*takai*), and perhaps led to the belief that, in traveling there, one could chance upon the spirits of the dead.

Kumano also has ties to Emperor Jimmu, the legendary first emperor of Japan, whose attempts to conquer the East (*Tōsei*) and unite the land of Yamato (the traditional name for Japan) took him to Kumano where he nearly met defeat. In one case he was poisoned, ironically enough, by a large bear (*ō-kuma*) only to be saved by a man named Kumano no Takakuraji. All of these legendary aspects of the land play into Nakagami’s fiction and even his essays, as he is wont to call Kumano “the land of darkness” (*yami no*
No doubt the topographical features of the area also contributed to this other-worldly image: with its mountains, large rivers, and wide-open sea, Kumano presented any number of difficulties for travelers in pre-modern Japan, and effectively separated it from the cultural and political capital, first in Nara, then in Kyoto.

Since those in pre-modern Japan considered Kumano such a sacred place (seichi), it is also worth mentioning that the Kumano area is perhaps best known as one of the birthplaces of Shugendō, the so-called “religion of the ascetic.” A folk religion, Shugendō formed in the ninth and tenth centuries, and its practitioners believed that, through austerities, they could gain supernatural or magical powers. This aspect of the land’s history, as a site for the birth of Shugendō, plays into Nakagami’s texts to varying degrees, but stands out the most in those stories that resemble *setsuwa* (fables).

Kumano historically consists of three areas—Hongū, Shingū, and Nachi—and, with each of these areas marked by a mountain, people also referred to it as the “Three Mountains of Kumano” (Kumano Sanzan). Three main temples were constructed in the Heian Period (794-1185), each one located in one of these areas of Kumano, and all three played an important role in both Shugendō and Buddhist pilgrimage practices. Many would make a pilgrimage from Kumano to Yoshino in the spring and make another pilgrimage, reversing the directions, in the fall. This journey, which became known as *Kumano mōde*, soon became so popularized that Heian aristocrats and, later, the elite of the Kamakura Period (1185-1333) took part in it.

Kumano also figures into the famous early medieval text, *Heike monogatari* (The Tale of the Heike). *Heike monogatari* has it that the Heike achieved their meteoric rise to
power through the blessing of the Kumano Shrine, the collective name for the three Kumano temples. When still a governor, Kiyomori, the Heike leader, makes a pilgrimage to the Kumano area. During his journey, a sea bass leaps into his boat and the mountain priest accompanying him informs Kiyomori that the fish is a sign from the gods, and directs him to eat the fish in spite of the fact that they are on a pilgrimage and must abstain from meat. Also, the Heike warrior Koremori decides to end his life in Kumano after the battle and defeat of the Heike at Dan no Ura. He makes the pilgrimage to the three shrines of Kumano before finally casting himself into the ocean.

The mythical associations with death and rebirth, so popular with the Buddhist-centered Heian culture, no doubt provided the spark for such interest in Kumano and the motive to make such an arduous journey. During the Insei Period (1086-1198) especially, a number of retired emperors made the pilgrimage; however, it is Retired Emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129) who generally receives credit for popularizing it during Shirakawa's lifetime, and all the way to the Middle Ages, a number of retired emperors, aristocrats, and warriors traveled on the rough road to Kumano in search of personal salvation. In light of comments like David Moerman's that, "Kumano appears at the very point of Japan's mythic origins ... as the dark and forbidding land of death," one may wonder how such high-ranking officials saw potential salvation in Kumano. But, to Moerman's description, one should perhaps add rebirth: many saw the shores of Kumano and the water beyond them as the divider between this world and the next. They longed to make a journey away from the land, across the ocean, and to another birth. Nakagami, on the other hand, spent his life attempting to get back to it, not in the sense of the land proper, but, rather, the idea of the land, what it constituted socially and spatially.
Such a place, one so central to the development of mythic Japan yet rendered as the embodiment of alterity, contains a wealth of symbolism; it is a space that Nakagami mined for inspiration and processed into material for many of his stories. Besides these pre-modern histories are the modern moments, such as the 1910 High Treason Incident discussed in the previous chapter. The High Treason Incident constituted a “living past” (ikita kako) for Nakagami, very much in his consciousness, and it, too, like the mythical origins of Kumano, stayed with him, inspiring a number of stories, among them “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie.” Karatani succinctly manages to capture how much this event affected Nakagami’s writing: “What gave Nakagami a special right as a writer,” he writes, “was not his birth in the hisabetsu-buraku, located throughout the world, but this High Treason Incident.”

Even if he does not invoke each and every detail within his stories, the history of the land is always present in his formulation of it. His writings foreground landscape, what would serve as the background in the works of other authors; and, speaking in broader terms, by setting his stories in the Kumano region, one traditionally regarded as “a place of unknown evils, unbound by the laws of the court and the state Buddhism,” Nakagami would, one would think based on essays like “Monogatari no keifu,” raise another voice in opposition to the voices that have marginalized Kumano, and, while not overturning this preceding system, at least move to destabilize it. Nakagami’s themes, however, never seem so clear-cut. Like the Japanese mōrōtai-style (vague forms) painting, he leaves his project distinctly indistinct, providing ample space for various interpretations and perhaps unsettling conclusions.
One can witness an example of such ambiguity in all of Nakagami’s works, but, in keeping with the Akiyuki narratives, I will focus on the discursive space of the roji, a topology unknown to Japanese literature or, one could even say, repressed from the canon.47 A euphemism for the buraku, the roji is an abject site, and one can perhaps see the writing of it as a method of correcting a historical repression. In its isolation, the roji topology also creates a space for the burakumin characters, though Nakagami rarely refers to them as such in his texts. This space possesses a certain freedom, but it is always a freedom that, as Furuhashi Nobuyoshi points out, is forced upon the burakumin and Nakagami’s characters, separated as the people are from the rest of “mainstream” society.48
3.3 The Ambivalence of Nakagami’s Space

3.3.1 Attempted Assertion over Space through Ritual

*Misaki* introduces the protagonist Akiyuki, a character who would appear in many other Nakagami stories. Akiyuki lives with his mother and stepfather, and works for his brother-in-law as a construction worker, the hard physical labor he takes part of each day one of the few enjoyments in his life. A murder of one of Akiyuki’s in-laws, Furuichi, serves as the impetus for the plot. Furuichi’s murder forces Akiyuki’s half-sister Mie, already in frail health, to overextend herself while caring for Furuichi’s family, and she quickly falls seriously ill. Though she appears to recover by the end, her illness and the murder serve to undo the repetition Akiyuki had managed to establish in his life up to this point. With that stability torn out from under him, Akiyuki begins to question his own identity, especially his identity as tied to his family. At twenty-four years old he must contend with memories of his half-brother who killed himself at the same age. Akiyuki recalls his brother as violent and disturbed—he frequently would come to Akiyuki and his mother’s house late at night, armed with a knife, and threaten to kill them—and he must reconcile this image with the nostalgic ones Mie and his mother have. The mother and sister draw comparisons between the brother and Akiyuki, and Akiyuki must fight this “resemblance” off, along with the comparisons that he draws between himself and his biological father, whom Akiyuki is physically estranged from but mentally haunted by. In the end Akiyuki chooses to confront the father and does so through sex with a young woman whom he suspects is the daughter of that man, his half-sister.

Like *Misaki*, “Garyūsan” features a large cast of characters and complex plot. It deals predominantly with Toshihisa, a young man who grew up as an orphan and now
runs his own fuel shop under the auspices of a wealthy landowner named Sakura. Sakura has a strange obsession with the surrounding land: originally his grandfather owned most of the mountains and the land where the roji is situated, but Sakura’s father and uncle practically gave the land away to the roji’s poor as socialist thought swept through the area in the late Meiji Period. Additionally, in the High Treason Incident, Sakura’s uncle was one of the suspects apprehended by the government and sentenced to die. The people of the roji reacted with indifference then and Sakura has never forgiven them for it. His resentment has festered over the years and comes to a head in his plot to reacquire all the land, particularly the Garyū Mountain (Garyūsan), by whatever means he can. Once he has it back in his possession, he wants to tear it all down. The reader learns this story slowly, through Toshihisa as he navigates the roji searching for answers in the gossip and rumors that pervade the area. Along the way he also confronts issues of his own origin, his parentage and his violent past from which he has tried to escape.

“Wara no ie” is a continuation of “Garyūsan,” but the only element continued concerns the razing of Garyū Mountain; Nakagami introduces a new cast of characters beginning with Takeshi, a young Korean who grew up in the roji but has since moved outside of it. Takeshi has a wife and two children, but appears dissatisfied with his life at home and has an affair with a woman who lives inside the roji. His relationship with her continues throughout the story and so do a series of fires, including one that strikes the business of a friend of the woman’s, Mon. Mon tells the woman the fires are actually arson, set as part of a plot to force the people out of the roji and, with the impending destruction of Garyū Mountain, the woman begins to fear for her life. Takeshi finds the plot preposterous, yet simultaneously disturbed by the woman’s powerful and persistent
fear. As the story closes Garyū Mountain has been completely razed. The two, alone in
the woman’s house, embrace, and the woman again expresses her fear. Whether Takeshi
believes it or not, the roji appears on the verge of meeting the same fate as the mountain.

In these stories the reader is struck by the narratorial perspective, which, though
(or perhaps because of it) aligned with the protagonists, views the roji from the outside. 49
Nakagami never flatters people with his descriptions: in Misaki alone men and women
are described as animals (normally dogs), they have disfigurements (Uncle Gen has a
hand shaped like a cow’s cloven hoof) and disgusting bodily traits (Yasuo’s armpits stink
so much it brings tears to Akiyuki’s eyes). One of the discriminations that has plagued
the burakumin has been the depiction of them in the social imagination as fundamentally
different from the “Japanese”; since these differences do not make themselves evident
physically, modern literature has seen the need to create such visual distinctions in the
form of disfigurements, tattoos, or illnesses. 50 Nakagami’s texts (willingly) fall prey to
the same issue. 51 The space of the roji, as a system of subjugation, necessarily marks the
people moving within its structure as different, and these differences, in Nakagami’s
works, manifest themselves in ways similar to the prejudices that mark modern literature
on the burakumin. Nakagami must preserve such differences because to do otherwise
would mean to replace difference with “identity” (dōitsusei), the condition, and myth, of
homogeneity.

Phrased another way, the roji is at once a space solely for the buraku people and a
controlling system, a maze of alleyways that constricts movement and sight. Towards the
end of Misaki, the character Uncle Gen comments: “What with all these twisty streets
wandering over the damn place, how’s a body supposed to get around? … You might as
well burn it [the roji] down." In a very literal sense, the roji exists as an oppressive system in that the buraku people have no choice, historically, but to live there since the government confined them to that space, though this again goes mostly unspoken in Nakagami’s texts. Beyond this, however, there are spatial instances within the texts themselves that establish the roji, and the nature coextensive with it, as a controlling force qua narrative and, simultaneously, a subversion of such a narrative. Near the start of both Misaki and “Garyūsan,” the two protagonists, Akiyuki and Toshihisa, respectively, stand on points above the city and look down upon it, recalling the act of kunimi (gazing down on the land) traditionally performed by the emperor. First, in Misaki, the narrator describes Akiyuki:

Turning around, he could see the whole town spread below him. The station was right in the center, and from there roads stretched out crosswise with clusters of houses between. He could see the business district, too. There was a small hill to the left of the station, and below that was the alleyway where his sister’s house stood ... The town was shaped like a bucket turned open toward the water. The sun shone down, and it all seemed so strange to him. Everything, bathed in the same light. Everything, breathing in the same rhythm. Here, in such close quarters, they laughed, celebrated, groaned, violating and heaping abuse on one another. Even the ones most hated had a place here.

Kunimi is a ceremony dating back to ancient Japan where the emperor “would ascend a mountain ... to meditate on the state of his land. The mountaintop was thought to be the point closest to the gods in heaven, and the ‘gazing’ was regarded in folk tradition as having a magical effect.” Akiyuki, here, stands in as an emperor figure, gazing down on and meditating upon his land, and he seems to find it more than satisfactory: in fact, the town before him, bathed in the same sunlight, assumes a homogenous light and breathes in the same rhythm until difference itself is demolished; each person has a place, even the most hated. It is exactly this type of action—maintaining the myth of identity through the
The image could be described as utopian in the sense that the light equalizes, rendering everything under it uniform; however, this suddenly collapses, giving way to a dystopian landscape: the sounds of pleasure—laughter, celebration—quickly shift to the disturbing—groaning and violation. Along these ambivalent lines, because Akiyuki is as distant from the emperor as one can get in terms of class, his mimicry of the imperial position also undermines it, and because he assumes the position of emperor, he simultaneously re-articulates the position’s authority.55

This destabilization is further reinforced only a few lines later as Akiyuki continues to stare out at the land: “He felt stifled. Oppressed. The land was hemmed in by mountains and rivers and the sea, and the people lived on it like insects or dogs.”56 In contrast to a space that the emperor stands over, views as an extension of himself, and basks in, Akiyuki views space as part of himself but one that is ironically stifling, oppressive, and hemmed in. In addition, it is important to note that this line, describing the land as “closed in” (yamayama to kawa ni tozasare, umi ni mo tozasareteite), will repeat itself in one form or another throughout Nakagami’s oeuvre.57 Nakagami uses this constant repetition as a self-reflexive device that works externally upon the reader, forcing him or her to recall each story, linked as they are through natural space. This creates a meta-space in which Nakagami has nested the burakumin, and while one can romanticize it as a space solely for them, it actually only reinforces their oppression: they are surrounded on all sides by mountains, rivers, and the ocean, enclosed by the landscape’s features. Although no one can easily penetrate this space, neither can anyone easily escape it; it is their land, but it is a repressive one.
Not only are particular spaces repeated within “Garyūsan,” but its principal character, Toshihisa, also takes part in another mimetic act of kunimi:

While climbing up through the flumes of grass, heading towards the single pine at the top, Toshihisa, in the middle of the tall grasses and stirring leaves, felt that he had gradually returned to his childhood of long ago ... Once you had climbed up to where the large billboard was, you were at the top. Since that spot was the precise center of Komoriku you could see the city in its entirety, even the station and the road that ran before it. The mountain was the one formerly called Garyū.58

Like Akiyuki, Toshihisa’s reenactment of the ancient rite undermines the emperor-system, the central symbol of oppression in Nakagami’s conception of monogatari as a suppressive force; and yet, like Nakagami’s use of the word tenkō in “Monogatari no keifu,” the reiteration of the kunimi act here is also a complicit one: in repeating the rite, Toshihisa also replaces the emperor in an (attempted) assertion of his will over the space of Komoriku. Given the discussion of space above, where social relations produce space, one can also read this act as an assertion over those performing the social practices, or, in other words, the people of Komoriku. This cannot work, however, not because of Toshihisa’s buraku birth, but because space, just as it is produced, also produces: space itself is a normative force, another narrative that subsumes Toshihisa within it.

In “Garyūsan” there are other instances of this attempted dominance over space. Toshihisa, the main character, works for a wealthy landowner named Sakura. Sakura’s family once owned most of the roji and the surrounding land (particularly Garyū Mountain), and he longs to get it back into his possession. He alludes to this at the start of the story, though Toshihisa as yet has no real idea what drives Sakura’s obsession:

*If you look at Naga from Hiyori, it’s a horse—barebacked, without even a saddle. Both the Hiyori and Naga that were part of this song were part of the mountain. The land of Komoriku, at the southern tip of Kishū, was surrounded in all four directions by the ocean, mountains, and rivers; and the city itself was at one time divided into two large halves by a mountain that resembled a crouching dragon.*
Now, aside from Naga Mountain located in back of the alley, there was nothing left of the mountain.

Sakura showed Toshihisa the map and aerial photograph of Komoriku, then spoke in a timid voice, withdrawn into itself: “I’d live out my days in comfort if I had something like this.”

A smile like a wrinkle came to his lips. The map he gripped was held carefully, like the jar or the plate that he treasured, and in fingers so pale and plump Toshihisa wondered if there were bones in them.

He drew his chair forward and his knees touched Toshihisa’s, just like a woman drawing herself up to a man, then pointed to the map and drew, with a finger, a straight line from Komoriku’s outskirts all the way to the river. “From here to here, right.”

He brought his face close to Toshihisa’s, and, with the two almost touching, he looked into Toshihisa’s eyes. “It’s a phantom mountain,” Sakura said. “Nothing’ll be left anymore. There’ll be nothing left at all.” A smile formed on his lips again, but Toshihisa could see Sakura’s eyes were moist.

...Sakura scrutinized the map and pointed from here to there with a finger. When Toshihisa craned his neck to look, Sakura withdrew three 10-yen coins from a pocket, and hid the remaining parts of the mountain on the map. “You get it? ... About how much will it cost?” Sakura asked.

Rather than answer, Toshihisa just stared at his face. Sakura’s filthy skin flushed slightly red, and with his soft fingers he gathered up the three 10-yen coins, put them in his pocket, and, as though what he had spoken of was a terrible embarrassment for him, he buried his face in the map, staring at it. 59

In this passage Sakura, rather directly, asks for Toshihisa’s help in razing what remains of Garyū Mountain, but becomes flustered when Toshihisa does not respond with equal excitement to the proposal. Sakura particularly finds pleasure in the map Toshihisa has brought with him. As Sakura scrutinizes and manipulates it, he is wholly engrossed by the possibilities of dominating over the space that the map portrays.

David Harvey writes that the map, through its attempt to objectively represent space, is a “totalizing device,” that it “is, in effect, a homogenization and reification of the rich diversity of spatial itineraries and spatial stories.”60 In order for a certain space to be conquered and controlled, Harvey continues, it must first be thought of as:

... something usable, malleable, and therefore capable of domination through human action. Perspectivism and mathematical mapping did this by conceiving of
space as abstract, homogenous, and universal in its qualities, a framework of thought and action which was stable and knowable.  

The map itself acts to homogenize and normalize, and Sakura, who obsesses over it, seeks to control the space it represents. He does, in fact, view the space in a way similar to the rite of *kunimi* in that he figuratively dominates over Komoriku by physically positioning himself over the map. In holding the map with the utmost care (*goshō daiji ni motte iru*), he treats it as though he has in his hands the very space of the city itself, and he then manipulates this space by placing three 10-yen coins over the remaining parts of the G apósu Mountain. Space, for him, is usable and malleable: he can dominate it with money symbolically—by placing coins over those areas he covets—or quite literally by buying the property. In this sense he shares certain characteristics with Akiyuki and Toshihisa: they, too, transform space—they actually must transform it—because they view natural space as part of the same system of oppression that spawned the *roji*.  

### 3.3.2 The Dominance of Space

While Akiyuki, Toshihisa, and Sakura all take part, in some fashion or other, in acts that assert themselves over space, subverting and reconstituting a narrative that has its history in the imperial system, space, too, through its natural topography, acts on the people in the same way the *monogatari* Nakagami speaks of acts on the unsuspecting—as a totalizing presence that engenders violence. Eve Zimmerman has written that “Nakagami suggests that landscape is as powerful a force as consciousness—that Akiyuki and his people are the puppets of forces beyond their control. The very forms of the landscape—a metaphor for the predetermined shape of narrative itself—render the human subject nameless and faceless.” As quoted above in *Misaki*, the narrator
expresses, via Akiyuki, how the land hems people in, and oppresses them with its features. *Misaki* then takes this further when the characters discuss the murder of Furuichi, the central event that drives the plot of the text: "'Fire and murder—our local specialties,' Akiyuki said ... You could probably find reasons for each fire and murder, if you looked carefully enough, but the real reason was the land itself, hemmed in by mountains and rivers and the sea and steaming in the sun. People went crazy fast."66 There is a similar description in "Garyūsan":

Each time there was a fire there was a rumor that it was arson. No matter where one dug in the city, it was said that there was not a single place where smooth, round stones could not be found, evidence that the land was, long ago, a dry river bed. The people lived, pressed in by the confining place—that was the reason there were so many fires.67

In both passages, the confining (*semai*) land is held responsible for the actions of the people. In *Misaki*, Akiyuki finds in it the reason for the prevalence of murders and fires, and similarly, in "Garyūsan," Toshihisa locates in the land the catalyst for arson. It should be noted here that in talking about topography we are still discussing space, albeit a natural space. As stated above, space is socially produced and natural space is the "common point of departure: the origin, and the original model, of the social process."68 One can perhaps then understand this natural space as an original model of narrative. Characters, as ridiculous as it may sound, pin responsibility for their violence on natural space: it encompasses them, piles in upon them, and like pressure building in a closed container, it must find release even if that means an explosion of violence.69 The space of the *roji*, as an urban space, has been built with that natural space as its foundation, and thus can be described as a version of it, or perhaps more accurately, as a space emergent from natural space but always tied to it.
3.3.3 Gendered Space and Origin

Though it will involve a brief digression from the current argument, it is necessary to interject here with a discussion on Nakagami’s genderfication of both the roji and natural space. Dealing with the roji first, Japanese critics such as Watanabe Naomi, Karatani Kōjin, and Asada Akira have all described it as a matriarchal space (bokei-teki-na kūkan). Alan Tansman also expresses a similar view: the roji “is a ‘feminine’ space, the womb from which Akiyuki sprang. Akiyuki is his father’s child, but he is also the alley’s child.”70 “Wara no ie” offers textual evidence of how such an argument can be made. In the following scene, Takeshi has just passed an old woman plucking grass, and reflects on the destruction of the mountain and the alley:

All the people of the city, just under 40,000 of them, were moving to demolish the mountain and the alley. They were driven by a strange fever, Takeshi thought. For him, the alley’s destruction didn’t matter, but for the woman [his lover] or for the old lady pulling up grasses to grow flowers, it was something that couldn’t be overlooked, something that perhaps set them ill at ease. The women were being chased from the land. The women were being chased out by Sakura and Kuwahara.71

Takeshi, here, describes a sexual battle and perhaps a gender-based one as well. In the passage, Takeshi associates the roji with women: the woman plucking grass and his lover. Mon should be included in this group as well since she, also, feels the pressure to leave the roji, her small restaurant burned to the ground, most likely by order of Sakura. Yet, while the conflict is clearly divided in terms of sex (Takeshi’s lover on one side and Sakura on the other, for instance), along gender lines the situation partially reverses itself. Sakura, though male, is frequently gendered as female: Toshihisa, in “Garyūsan,” sees him as “a man who behaved in the smooth manner of a woman, gentle with his words”
The women, on the other hand, often take on masculine characteristics. Takeshi’s lover, along with many other Nakagami women, often initiates sex, placing herself in what has conventionally been a masculine position, and, consequently, she shifts Toshihisa into a feminine one. In one scene, early on in “Wara no ie,” Takeshi tacitly grasps this reversal of roles: “Takeshi didn’t bring the woman into the bedroom; the woman cajoled Takeshi and took him into the bedroom. With her lips, the woman sucked and licked from the tips of his feet to the top of his head, until he realized that lovemaking wasn’t only something that women did, but something that men did as well.” The conflict is clearly sexually and/or gender marked within “Wara no ie,” but in other stories the lines are much less clearly drawn.

Nina Comyetz believes critics feminize the roji because “of the pervasive modern myth that has gendered the monogatari [the pre-modern genre] as ‘feminine,’” while the monogatari has actually been, historically, a voice for men. She gives examples in Chi no hate shijō no toki to show that the roji represents just as much a masculine structure as a feminine one. Natural space, too, is portrayed in gendered terms. The very title Misaki, “The Cape,” for instance, has obvious phallic connotations. At one point, when Akiyuki and his family visit the ocean, Akiyuki describes the scene as such: “The tip of the cape, shaped like an arrowhead, protruded into the sea, another stretch of bluish green. Waves beat and splashed up against the black rocks of the cape.” Not only is the cape likened to a phallus, but the scene is also descriptively sexual, the water gendered as feminine.

In “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie” the mountain represents another phallus, the patriarchal symbol that Toshihisa, Sakura, and Takeshi long for and long to destroy. In
fact, the mountain is often compared to Morido, a sickly old man who lives his life sealed away in his room and who has mysterious ties to both Sakura and Toshihisa\textsuperscript{79}: “The wind moved the trees as though the mountain were breathing. Toshihisa imagined Morido, inside his house within the alley, the sound of his breath coinciding with the mountain’s.”\textsuperscript{80} Space, as a whole, can be argued to be neither matriarchal nor patriarchal, but rather a dual space or a \textit{parental} space, composed of the relation between the two genders, a duality of the sort that Cornyetz argues for.\textsuperscript{81}

Principal characters in all three stories under consideration possess ambivalent attitudes to this space. As demonstrated above, they stand over space, asserting their dominance over it, yet at the same time are hedged in by it. Further, all of these characters are men in their early to late twenties struggling to understand who they are. Instinct tells them to look to their point of origin—to their parentage in other words—but when they do they find they do not like what they see or they find nothing there at all: Akiyuki is estranged from his father, and while he seems on good terms with his mother, he thinks her irresponsible and selfish, and often blames her for the situation with his father; Toshihisa has grown up in an orphanage, not knowing either of his parents; and Takeshi, born in Japan but of Korean descent, states that his father was a migrant worker and never at home and his mother was always at work.\textsuperscript{82}

All three have issues, not simply with their parentage, but indeed with the very notion of parentage, which they perceive in and through the urban space of the \textit{roji} and the natural space of Komoriku. Each wants to overcome the forces that gave birth to him, yet each one feels simultaneously threatened by forces, fearing the power that determined that they exist might also determine how they exist.\textsuperscript{83} Many critics see the space of the

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roji as a textual instantiation of the monogatari. But on the much larger scale of space itself, Nakagami’s texts deal with the monogatari of the family, a monogatari that “each individual must pass through.”[84] Because the family as narrative, at least in these texts, presents itself as such a monolithic presence, the actions of the young male protagonists can be read as a violence performed against their origins, and in Nakagami’s case, the literature that preceded him, both modern (kindai) and pre-modern (zen-kindai).

3.3.4 Reconstructing Space

These young men work against tradition by working against space, for instance dominating the natural space in mimetic acts of kunimi. In many of Nakagami’s stories, they also challenge and, to an extent, undo both natural and urban space through their everyday actions as well. The majority of Nakagami’s protagonists are construction workers (dokata) or laborers (ninpu), Akiyuki, who works with his brother-in-law’s construction unit in Misaki, chief among them.[85] Zhang Wen Ying even describes the Akiyuki of Misaki as a “destroyer of the roji” (roji no hakaisha)[86]; Akiyuki enjoys the physical labor, the hyper-masculinity of it:

He [Akiyuki] brought the pick down. It plunged cleanly through the earth. He guided it back up, and the earth rose, turning over. He put down the pick and took up the shovel. Putting his whole back into it, Akiyuki placed his foot on a corner of the shovel and dug down in … His body got used to the digging, his breath adjusting to the rhythm of the work. Digging was what he liked most. More than anything, it made him feel he had truly worked.[87]

Physical labor makes Akiyuki feel like a man (otoko rashikatta), he appreciates its simplicity and the exertion he has to put forth. He calls it “honorable” (totoi) work, but what he really participates in is the reshaping of space according to the orders of whatever contractor has hired his group out.[88] His actions are at once the destruction of
nature or the roji and a participation in spatial transformation. Toshihisa and Takeshi differ from this in that they are not laborers—Toshihisa runs a fuel shop and Takeshi works for a freight company—and do not participate directly in the reconstruction of space. Takeshi does, however, express the desire to see the roji burned to the ground: “Takeshi had thought [for some time] he would like to see the fire that would burn down the alleyway.”89 Though he never sets a fire, the desire is there as it is in many of the characters in Nakagami’s roji narratives, such as Toshihisa’s cousin, Yoshitarō, who expresses similar sentiments.

Toshihisa’s case is much more difficult to argue in that he only runs a fuel shop, constantly delivering filled gas cylinders to households and reclaiming the used ones. His propane gas cylinders, however, supply the arsonists with the fuel to start fires throughout the roji:

Toshihisa believed, without a doubt, that the fire was arson. The fire started at the market before the train station, and then, fanned by an opportune wind, consumed three shops lined up next to it and partially destroyed two more.

Satomi, who ran the Southern Weekly, had pieced together all the rumors, saying that the fire started where the last vestiges of the black market were. There were a great number of people gossiping that it was arson. A group of people fighting over a single six by six foot block of land there had taken their battle to court.

Someone had cut the hose of a gas cylinder installed on the outside of a small restaurant, loosened the cock, and lit the fire. The gas spurting out of the hose caught and spewed a fire just like a flamethrower. In a second, the fire had moved to the market and, fanned by the wind, burst into a blaze.90

Though he may not willingly supply the arsonists with the means to destroy the roji, he is connected to their modus operandi, and, in the story’s climactic moment, he himself follows this same pattern and sets fire to a house in order to cover up what would appear to be a murder.91 In the space opened up by the fires Sakura plans to construct an
enormous supermarket, and so even Toshihisa, albeit obliquely, participates in the
destruction of the roji space and its subsequent reconfiguration.

3.4 Conclusion: The Same Struggle by Another Name

Overall, Nakagami’s texts create layer upon layer of usurpation: the space of the
fictional city Komoriku undercuts the traditional narrative space of the emperor by
replacing it in acts identified as kunimi; and that space, now assuming the position of a
new narrative, is in turn subverted through the physical labor and arson fires, which
actually only succeed in reconfiguring the roji, nature, or, put simply, space. Such a
reconstruction yields nothing but another permutation of narrative. This is perhaps what
leads Karatani to state that “no one is free from this narrative,” referring to the narrative
of the family, but subsequently, since the two exist together in Nakagami’s works, the
narrative of space as well.92

The roji plays such an important role in so many of Nakagami’s stories that it can
hardly be termed a backdrop, but rather assumes all the importance of a main character. It
is a meta-space in the same sense that Nakagami’s narrative (monogatari) is a meta-
narrative, and equally as dangerous. Watanabe Naomi, in fact, has written that “the
expression Nakagami has given the roji in writing it is certainly one ‘without compare’
hirui nai) … But if that were all he had done, then Nakagami would be a mere racist—
one ‘without compare.’”93 What Watanabe implies here is that it is tempting to look on
the roji with the eyes of a romantic since it is, as a troping of the buraku, a space for the
burakumin. As Nakagami portrays it, it is hermetic, a world all their own, and once the
reader steps inside, the rest of Japan seems to fall away like a foreign country. And yet,
because the burakumin were historically situated there, a simple re-rendering of that space, even under the euphemism of the roji, only reproduces the same system of discrimination.

In “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” Nakagami begins to destroy this space through arson fires and the heavy machines that chew away at Garyū Mountain. However, another space must necessarily come in on the heels of the previous one. Nakagami’s roji texts, in other words, ultimately amount to a process of continued substitution, replacing one narrative with another, destroying one space in order to situate another one. Similarly, his stories tell of men trying to assert themselves over space, only to be asserted over by that very space; they also tell of laborers and construction workers tearing apart a natural space to construct an urban one, and arsonists burning down the urban in favor of a capitalistic space. Such acts of repetition are a form of narrativity, but that repetition does not mean that his narrative bogs down in one isolated moment. Furuhashi comments that, “The roji was a mythical world that integrated history and the beginnings of society.”\(^{94}\) Nakagami’s narratives actively engage with both modernity and pre-modernity, and with the family as space in the gender-coded landscape of Kumano. All of this amounts to a struggle with tradition, exactly the focus of Nakagami’s polemic in “Monogatari no keifu.” It is, in other words, an attempt to overcome origin, but that attempt, just like the ambivalence inherent in Nakagami’s space, means that he must always carry tradition around with him in the contours of his fiction, and can never be free of it.
Chapter 4

The Place of Memory

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Space and Place

Toshihisa gathered up grasses, piled them up, then spread open newspaper sheets and weekly magazines he had found, and stuffed them, one after another, inside of his shirt. He spent the night in the blades of grass. He wasn’t cold or frightened. When the wind blew the mountain sounded. Even now, when he listened closely, he could hear the sound of those blades of grass rubbing against one another, and the sound of branches rubbing up against branches. – Toshihisa in “Garyūsan”

Place has traditionally played an important role in Japanese literature, perhaps most prominently in the form of utamakura, a term used to describe the association of a place name in classical Japanese poetry with certain standard images and feelings. The readers of waka could, through these associations, connect to a place that they might never have seen before, as long as they knew the literary associations contained within the utamakura. Employing these toponyms in the waka poetry enriched the poem’s meaning and also opened them to other spaces and other times. Such a literary device makes each poem, Edward Kamens says, into “a space, and a moment, in which the deposits of time and memory lie exposed to view.”

At the same time, because waka intersected with imperial throne, Kamens also adds that: “Some scholars see the appropriation of the names of places into the language of an authorized and protected discourse—waka—as yet another form of colonization, a neutralization of regional identity that leads inevitably toward its subsumption into a relatively homogenized and anonymous ‘national’ conglomerate.” As mentioned earlier, Kumano, too, has been appropriated into the imperial structure, namely in the origin myth.
Kumano also has particular associations for Nakagami, who was intensely aware of the land’s historical associations, always present in those stories even if they are never explicitly stated. In this way, like the scholars of *waka* that Kamens refers to, Nakagami appeals to the curious child in all of us to turn history around and around, and examine it from various angles, especially from the periphery to the center. His characters, too, involve themselves in the examination of history, particularly their own. History for them consists of memory and lineage, an embodied form of memory, and both have ties to specific places: in the former case, specific topographic sites, and in the latter, sites of the body. While the characters in *Misaki*, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie” have differing attitudes towards place, through the investigation of these places they explore their own histories and, eventually, work toward an origin of narrative, a process that has embedded within it the possibility of change.

It is important here to distinguish between the concept of space and place, a task made all the more difficult because many thinkers, such as David Harvey and Henri Lefebvre, who do not define place, instead taking it, if not as a synonym of space, then as something that at least functions within it. J.E. Malpas writes about this latter trend: “Concepts of place are often not distinguished at all from notions of simple physical location, while sometimes discussions that seem implicitly to call upon notions of place refer explicitly only to a narrower concept of space.” While place may not refer to a simple reduction of space, there does appear to be some degree of “locality” involved in its conception: scholars often describe it as the point where one *is* at a particular point in time; they describe it as closed, stable and secure, which, taken to its extreme, leads to its subsumption into the concept of space, thought, in contrast, to be open or borderless.
Michel de Certeau, for instance, "distinguishes between 'place' (lieu), which is definable, limited, enclosed, and 'space' (espace), which is constantly being produced by the practices of living." However, many thinkers have labeled such ways of thinking reductionist and argue not only that place is more dynamic than that, but that the two concepts—place and space—actually interpenetrate each other. One can see examples of this in the conjoined use of the two terms, "space" and "place," a practice that allows them to mutually define themselves. Doreen Massey has attempts to deal with place in terms of social relations, the same way that she handles space:

[We must consider space] in terms of the articulation of social relations which necessarily have a spatial form in their interactions with one another. If this notion is accepted, then one way of thinking about place is as particular moments in such intersecting social relations, nets of which have over time been constructed, laid down, interacted with one another, decayed and renewed.

Massey's definition relies again on locality, but in temporal terms—place itself, however, can move beyond mere physicality and take on a dimension of spatiality. In other words, space may contain places, but place can also contain various spaces. This is perhaps what J.E. Malpas refers to when he writes that "place is inextricably bound up with notions of both dimensionality or extension and of locale or environing situation." Dimensionality is conventionally a spatial concept while locale tends to reference concepts of fixity or place, and, by incorporating the two, Malpas offers a corrective to the reductionist notions of place as something less than space. Ultimately, however, this lends no clearer explanation of what place is or, more to the point, how one should consider it.

Many studies have been done on ties between place and memory, place and experience, place and identity, and the like. Psychology and psychoanalysis particularly take such approaches, and from these one could posit place as a term that deals very
much with the individual, a subjective construction; but Malpas, for instance, tries to move beyond such a phenomenological understanding, stating that place also assumes characteristics of the objects “nested” within it. Ultimately, place contains both subjective and objective aspects, affecting the individual and the collective just as much as it is affected by them. “Place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience,” he writes, meaning that place makes experience possible, it is “that wherein the being that is characteristically human has his ground.”\(^{10}\) Along these same lines, Peter Middleton and Tim Woods have argued “that we should use ‘place’ as a term to describe spaces that are as much parts of the social imaginary as people and ideas. Places are loci of memory; reference points of narratives, propositions and emotions; signs of the passing of time and the histories that mark it.”\(^{11}\) Place serves as exactly such a reference point in the lives of Akiyuki, Toshihisa, and Takeshi; they use it as though it were a clock, but one that works steadily backwards to the origin of their own narratives.

4.1.2 The Recovery of Origin

In the previous chapter I discussed space as a field inscribed with narrative almost like an instructional text used to propagate the dominant ideology. Like space, place has been soaked in narrative, but a solution of both the individual and the collective. Characters in Nakagami’s texts use place as a reference point in their own history; because they struggle with their own constitutive narratives, they also struggle with these places that locate them.

In reference to landscape painting, Karatani Kōjin has written: “Once a landscape has been established, its origins are repressed from memory. It takes on the appearance of
an ‘object’ which has been there, outside us, from the start. An ‘object,’ however, can only be constituted within a landscape. The same may be said of the ‘subject’ or self.\textsuperscript{12}

Henri Lefebvre voices a similar opinion when he writes:

The object produced often bears traces of the \textit{materiel} and time that have gone into its production—clues to the operations that modified the raw material used. This makes it possible for us to reconstruct those operations. The fact remains, however, that productive operations tend in the main to cover their tracks; some even have this as their prime goal: polishing, staining, plastering, and so on. When construction is completed, the scaffolding is taken down; likewise, the fate of an author’s rough draft is to be torn up and tossed away.\textsuperscript{13}

Lefebvre, here, like Karatani, is talking about landscape, but not only in reference to the artistic category: he refers to expanses of scenery, whether natural, industrial, or urban. Lefebvre also goes on to point out that: “It is not sufficient, in any case, merely to bring out an object’s structure and to understand that structure: we need to generate an object in its entirety—that is, to reproduce, by and in thought, that object’s forms, structures and functions.”\textsuperscript{14} If we understand landscape as a particular, subjective form of place, then one method of overcoming the repression that Karatani and Lefebvre speak of, one method of uncovering one’s origins, would entail a thorough reconstruction of landscape’s history, the process of its production.

In “Monogatari no keifu” Nakagami explores narrative (\textit{monogatari}) as a determinative force existing throughout time. His fictions attempt to disturb the flow of such a meta-narrative’s path, an undertaking that, as Iguchi Tokio writes, “is achieved by tracing narrative back to its originary root.”\textsuperscript{15} The history of the land and the characters’ own personal experiences, often tied to place, form a narrative, one that works backward to recover the process of production of both place and the individual. Like a firefighter setting one fire to nullify another fire, Nakagami positions the narratives of \textit{Misaki},

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“Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie” in opposition to monogatari as described in “Monogatari no keifu.” The latter represses its own origins in order to create and perpetuate the image (or illusion) of unity, while Nakagami’s narratives do the exact opposite and work backwards through a process of rememory to excavate origin and challenge identity.

When Nakagami explores place in his stories, he undertakes a genealogical mapping of history: his stories examine the formative experiences, the moments that leave indelible marks on the person’s psyche, and, in effect, trace the personal narrative of a character back to its origin. Yet, as his characters gradually work their way back through the overgrown times and spaces to get at that originary goal, they must also repeat it. In other words, Nakagami may reveal origin but it takes the repetition of narrative to do so.16

Nakagami’s fictions reinterpret the past into the present, what the American Nobel laureate Toni Morrison refers to in her own fiction as “rememory.”17 Rememory forms a fundamental undercurrent that runs throughout much of Nakagami’s corpus. The recollection and reinterpretation of the past can lead to nostalgia and sentimentality—what some might consider a shortcoming—but for the most part Nakagami’s texts elide this. Instead, the characters fear it, almost as though, in the act of recalling, it becomes an unknown that lies before them rather than a known that has already passed them. They understand the future as a past that lies ahead of them, threatening and waiting. In this sense, one could look at his stories as narratives told in reverse.
In *Misaki*, Akiyuki feels, intensely, the presence of both his dead half-brother and his estranged father. Neither one would be a good role model: the brother was an alcoholic who frequently flew into murderous rages before finally committing suicide; and the father, who has cheated people out of money in order to increase his own wealth, has also fathered several children with various women. Yet Akiyuki never questions which one he will turn out to be, though the narrator does try to muddle the narrative path: throughout the novella Akiyuki fears he will repeat the father, as much as he struggles against what the father represents.

"Garyūsan" and "Wara no ie" involve repetition as well. Toshihisa in "Garyūsan" was a delinquent youth who has since repressed all the memories of whatever wrongs he may have done, and constructs the persona of an upstanding citizen founded on that buried past. As the story moves along, however, other people recall his past acts for him, and remind him of them while he tries to stifle each one. When he strangles the woman Hatano who continues to badger him with these reminders, he, in effect, returns to the exact violence of his youth that he has been trying to repress. Takeshi, who, like Toshihisa, grew up in the *roji* but has since left it, detests it because of his unhappy childhood—he even describes wanting to see the *roji* destroyed. Nevertheless, he continues to return there, having an affair with an anonymous woman who embodies both the *roji* and his childhood. Meanwhile, his absence at home, where he has a wife and two children, recreates an environment similar to the one he despised when he was a child. In all three of these stories it is "the specter of repetition that haunts the lives of the characters."18 Characters in works of Japanese Naturalism (*Shizenshugi*) face a similar dilemma of repetition, but theirs originates in genetics: they inherit the same disposition
of their forebears; in Nakagami’s works the characters are “cursed” to repeat the mistakes of the past.¹⁹

In the discussion on place that follows, I will treat place as a concept commensurate with the locality described above, invested with personal narratives of memory, but I will also attempt not to limit place to a specific point on a grid—it extends beyond any notion of fixity, it is “dependent on its interconnection with other places.”²⁰ It can operate in such a way, not only in terms of dimension (spatiality), but in terms of time as well, connecting to the “same” place at a different time. For the characters Akiyuki, Toshihisa, and Takeshi place is a locus of enunciation that functions, not as a text, but as part of a “texture,” as Lefebvre calls it, that shapes them and their notion of space. The paths that they traveled as children growing up in the roji form a net of experience marked by nodes or places, and this textual web wraps around them like a straightjacket they try to work their way out of but, conversely, only succeed in drawing tighter around them.

4.2 Narratives of Place in Misaki, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie”

4.2.1 The Brother and Father in Misaki

Misaki opens with Akiyuki sharing drinks with his construction unit workers at their boss’s house. His half-sister, Mie, also the boss’s wife, asks Akiyuki to leave the gathering and walk her to their mother’s house. On their way there, Mie tells him, “Just now I had this feeling you were [Brother] … Akiyuki, hold my hand like Brother used to. We always used to walk along this road holding hands on our way to Mother’s house.”²¹
Two narratives haunt Akiyuki throughout Misaki: the first involves memories of his older half-brother who frequently threatened to kill Akiyuki and his mother, and then unexpectedly killed himself; the second narrative concerns his biological father who is still alive but, because Akiyuki has never known him, remains an enigma that he can never fully penetrate. Although both specters plague him, the narrative of his brother pursues him because others draw similarities between him and the brother.

When the brother was twenty-four years old he would come to his mother’s house, drunk, with a knife or ax, and threaten to kill her and Akiyuki, then only twelve. Each time he would stop shy of carrying out his threat, until on Girl’s Day (Hina Matsuri), he acts on his talk of violence, but turns it on himself rather than against the ones he hates: he commits suicide by hanging himself from a tree in the family’s garden. Akiyuki, now twenty-four himself, physically reminds Mie and their mother of the dead brother. They, and particularly Mie, frequently discuss how much he resembles the brother, a comparison that Akiyuki cannot believe; instead, he is convinced that he looks like his father, whom he refers to only as “that man” (ano otoko): “This body, this face—no way could he look like his brother. His brother had a beautiful face ... But Akiyuki’s face belonged to that man. The ugliest face in the world, the crudest face, a face full of evil, Akiyuki thought to himself. That man always watching from a distance. Always chasing him.” But the father and the brother both pursue Akiyuki, their absence in Akiyuki’s life creating a palpable presence.

At times Akiyuki feels hatred for his family, one that resembles the brother’s, but he appears similarly incapable of acting on it. The brother was an originary site of narrative: his violence, always threatening to explode out, in the end found no outlet and
instead consumed itself. It then starts a pattern where that origin is repeated. Akiyuki himself is keenly aware of it:

So many times the brother had come to the house with a knife or an ax to kill the mother and himself, and now the brother’s life had been cut short before he had seen the blood and heard the screams of those he had detested. Twelve years had passed. Akiyuki was twenty-four. The boy born to Mie the year the brother died was now twelve. Some things had changed completely. And some things were just the way they had been twelve years ago.27

Akiyuki, now at the same age as the brother, faces many of the same feelings, particularly a growing rage. Altogether he “seems like that brother’s reincarnation,” but he can actually never take his place, only repeat it.28

In the scene where Mie and Akiyuki walk home, Mie specifically recalls a memory of the older brother holding her hand to lessen her fright. This memory lies first in the place—the road in the alley—which she walked with the brother on countless occasions. In recollecting that time and place she also attempts to reenact it, with Akiyuki substituting for the brother and the place of the past overlaying the place of present. In this way, origin is “recovered,” as it were, and the narrative of the older brother moves to overcome Akiyuki.

Mie, in particular, is the conduit for this: she has strong feelings for her dead brother, and when she falls ill, she mentally regresses to a child-like state or to a time when the brother was still alive. In her deranged condition she focuses on Akiyuki as a replacement for the brother. In one scene, Akiyuki comes home to find another older sister, Yoshiko, concerned about where he has been:

“Mie kept calling, ‘Akiyuki, Akiyuki,’ as if you were her lover or something.”
“Tomorrow, take your sister and go to the cape,” said the mother. He [Akiyuki] stared at her.
"We'll all go to the cape together just like the old days," said Mie. "We'll all go, won't we. Akiyuki, we'll have a picnic." She tapped on a fake straw-patterned plastic basket that she was holding close to her chest.29

Again, the cape has nested within it the memory of family picnics, and by taking Mie there Akiyuki will participate in the re-enactment of the memory. The move is designed to help Mie, to set her mind, always longing for the brother, at ease, but it is Akiyuki who must suffer, albeit at the hands of the intangible. His brother’s existence tries to displace Akiyuki’s, but, in the end, only succeeds in juxtaposing it. When they actually go to picnic Mie complains, "If only Brother were here."30 So elated at the prospect of the picnic, Mie experiences utter dejection when actually there, aware that Akiyuki’s existence cannot be displaced; she has been searching for a cure, but only found a transparent placebo.

The other narrative that Akiyuki must deal with concerns the narrative of his father, an unknown in his life, which prevents him from fully understanding himself. The relationship with the father continues to develop in the next two novels of the trilogy—Karekinada and Chi no hate shijō no toki—as Akiyuki gets closer and closer to him, each stage marked by new level of Akiyuki’s ambivalent attitude, a commingling of hatred and desire. In Misaki the story has only begun to get underway, but that piercing ambivalence makes itself deeply felt: he despises his father, often referring to him as evil, and yet there is a powerful fascination and desire to know him. The father represents the main source of Akiyuki’s internal conflict even though in Misaki he appears more infrequently than the dead brother.

Akiyuki’s memories of the brother nest themselves in the house of his step-father and mother, where the brother threatened to kill them, or Mie’s house, the family’s
former house and where the brother committed suicide. In contrast to this, Akiyuki has no memories of his father: the man was in jail when Akiyuki was born, and when released three years later he attempts to return to the house, but Akiyuki’s mother rejects him. Though the man still lives in the city, Akiyuki has seen him only occasionally, sometimes encountering him when on errands for work. One of the few ways for Akiyuki to “remember” his father is through his own body, which he believes resembles that man’s. While members of his family, such as his mother and sisters, see the older brother in him, Akiyuki only perceives the father:

Akiyuki looked just like his father. Sometimes it occurred to him that through his veins, too, ran the same sensuous blood that would make him chase a woman whether she was a widow with children, a whore, or a proper young woman. He’d kick someone when they were down. Betray his friends. Take advantage of another’s weaknesses. Where had that man come from?31

The question at the end of the passage could just as well refer to Akiyuki himself: he does not know the father and he does not know himself; he wants to remain aloof from the man, but knowing intuitively that that would mean isolation from himself, he continues to search out that originary moment, albeit in an oblique manner.

Akiyuki is intensely afraid that he will repeat the father. Thoughts of sex and women arouse in him a swampy mixture of disgust and revulsion which settles over his fear that such carnal desires, if indulged, will debase him and also serve as the spark that allows his father, waiting in the folds of his skin, to explode out. Such fear makes it extremely difficult for him to work towards the origin that his father represents. He must move toward it with trepidation and somatically, via himself as a site of his father and via Kumi, his half-sister through that man.32
Kumi, a prostitute thinly disguised as a waitress, works in the red light district at a bar named the Yayoi. Akiyuki, having heard of her existence through rumors and stories his mother has told him, has a deep fascination with her because she is one of the children fathered by “that man,” and thus the only relative he has through his father’s bloodline; everywhere else he is surrounded by relatives through his mother. By getting closer to her he hopes to get closer to his father, and, subsequently, closer to the start of his own narrative.

The Yayoi bar as a place, however, presents an obstacle for him that he must first overcome. Each time he approaches it, wanting to find Kumi and confirm her identity, he falls short of going inside. His first attempt is aborted without much of an effort: “Two doors down was a bar that his brother had been known to frequent when he was alive. The Yayoi. Akiyuki hurried past it. He sensed he was being watched, and he felt forbidden to enter the bar, or even walk in front of it.” The gaze he senses here could be either the dead brother or the father—the narrator is ambiguous—but that ambiguity also blurs the distinction between the two. The brother used to frequent the bar and, at the same time, Akiyuki’s half-sister works there, tying the two narratives to this one place.

As much as the place of the Yayoi threatens Akiyuki, it also has a special allure that he cannot easily resist. On the first occasion that he enters it, however, he finds himself unable to ask Kumi the question that has occupied him for so long; Kumi naturally takes him for a customer and becomes quickly offended when he refuses her overtures for sex. The second occasion picks up where the first left off: beginning in medias res with half-brother and half-sister already involved in an act of incest, though Kumi remains unaware of the fact that Akiyuki is her half-brother. In spite of the fact that
Akiyuki has yet to confirm her identity, there seems to be little doubt in his mind that she is the daughter of "that man." Through the act of sex, or through the site of her body, Akiyuki approaches the source of his own body, his father:

This woman was definitely his younger sister, he thought. Their hearts were beating hard. How I’ve longed for you, their hearts were saying to each other … He wanted to pluck out his beating heart and press it into her breast, merge their two hearts, rub them one against the other. The woman moaned. Their sweat flowed. I’m your brother. We two are the pure children of that man, the one I can now call ‘Father’ for the first time. If only we had hearts for sex organs. Akiyuki wanted to rip open his chest, and show his sister, her eyes closing as she strained and moaned, the blood of that man running through his veins.  

One of the narrative threads running through *Misaki* involves Akiyuki’s struggle with his paternity—he cannot accept that man as his father, and yet he simultaneously yearns for him; he wants to degrade the man, but he ends up degrading himself through sex with his half-sister. The story, taken as a hermetic entity, is Oedipal to an extent, but it never arrives at a confrontation with the father, only with the concept of the father as it resides in the protagonist, Akiyuki. Uniting with his half-sister’s body through sex, Akiyuki arrives at a point where he can accept “that man” as he exists within Akiyuki. The final scene thus culminates in Akiyuki’s acceptance of his bloodline, and because he always sees the father through his own body, it is, finally, an acceptance of himself as well.

One naturally wants to see this acceptance as a positive, but as seems so typical of Nakagami, the positive undergoes an inversion and this acceptance is described in predominantly negative terms. Although Akiyuki might gain a better understanding of his father, only an act of incest can allow him to accomplish it. Not only that, but Akiyuki has also given up his virginity, which he viewed as the line that must be held in order for him to maintain his own purity in the face of the degradation he sees in the world, his fellow workers and his family. For instance, prior to having sex his armpits are said to
“smell fresh, like soap” (aoi yōna sekken no yōna nioi suru), but once he has lost his virginity, even though it leads to an acknowledgement of his father and himself, he imagines his armpits will stink (wakiga no nioi ga suru) from that day on. The acceptance of the father does not proceed smoothly to a neatly resolved ending because of what the father represents. Accepting him, for Akiyuki, means opening himself to everything his father is, including the possibility of repeating him.

Narratives are marked by pattern, by the repetition of form. Akiyuki constantly fears the narrative of both his father and his brother, and, when Misaki begins, his method for keeping them at bay involves the continual repetition of the present, which, like nostalgia, is an ineffectual act. The narrator sums up Akiyuki’s daily life: “Come home from a hard day’s work, take a bath, eat supper, go to sleep. Get up the next morning, wash your face, have breakfast ... Every day was the same.” As long as he can continue to repeat the present he feels secure, but too many variables exist outside of his control in order to maintain that pattern, and the moment his fellow laborer, Yasuo, kills another man it collapses. Akiyuki is then opened to the potentiality of his own history, the narratives of his father and dead brother, as it unfolds out before him. Watanabe Naomi describes Akiyuki as “porous” (takō-teki), and, in a sense, he is always, from the very beginning, open to these narratives. Through confrontations with them, particularly through the body as place, he uncovers the basis for his own existence. This permeability marks the subject in Nakagami’s fiction, including the characters of Toshihisa and Takeshi in “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” respectively.
4.2.2 Garyü Mountain and Toshihisa

Toshihisa, at one point in “Garyūsan,” listens to his cousin recount the past and thinks back to his own: “When Toshihisa was five years old his mother died. Thereafter he was taken in as a foster child by the household of distant relatives on his father’s side. The family’s name was Kitaura. He thought fondly of the alley, but he hardly had any recollection of it.” Memory is a problem for Toshihisa. He recalls little about his own childhood, and what he can recall suffers from a polluting haze that prevents him from ascertaining the circumstances surrounding each memory.

The most certain recollections necessarily come from outside of him, from the characters that he interacts with who tell him about moments of his own history, and from the gossip that seems to float about on the air. The unreliability of Toshihisa’s own recollections, however, has nothing to with faulty memory so much as a constant effort to repress the past. In one scene, Toshihisa and a wealthy woman named Hatano discuss Takigawa-sensei, a man who ran the detention house Toshihisa lived in when he was younger. The two have been drinking and as the conversation gets closer to Toshihisa and his past, Toshihisa becomes increasingly uncomfortable:

“Mr. Takigawa is an honest man.”

Hatano shook her head. “No, no, no! He doesn’t understand how children feel. Not once has he ever thought about why children act like delinquents or why the world is so twisted. He thinks suggesting the rest home needs a television set or sending chocolate to the detention home is going to make this world a better place. I mean, if you had just happened to get some chocolate, would you have stopped doing bad things?”

“Bad things? What did I do that was bad?” Toshihisa smiled wryly.

As though his smile fanned the alcohol in her system, Hatano replied, “You don’t think you were bad? You, with your somber eyes, always sneaking off to do terrible things! I remember everything that you did.”

“You mean just keeping improper sexual company with you.”

“No, no, no!” Hatano shook her head again. “If I let you out of my sight just for a bit, you’d soon be in a fight or pinching somebody’s things!”
Toshihisa, hearing Hatano’s words, remembered his old self. He didn’t want to remember anything about the past. He felt anger close to hatred as Hatano still tried to talk on about those past events. 

Like Akiyuki, Toshihisa does not want to have to deal with the source of his own self, and he attempts, in parts, to evade it; however, unlike Akiyuki, he does not do so by throwing himself into repetitive physical labor. Instead, he simply tries to repress the past, only to find the people around him and his own curiosity about certain aspects of it (ostensibly not related to him) preventing him from completely burying it. Both, in fact, force him to confront it.

In the same passage discussed earlier in relation to kunimi, Toshihisa also begins to uncover moments of his childhood as he climbs Garya Mountain: “While climbing up through the flumes of grass, heading towards the single pine at the top, Toshihisa, in the middle of the tall grasses and stirring leaves, felt that he had gradually returned to his childhood. He had rigged traps to catch small birds on that mountain.” The narrator here juxtaposes Toshihisa’s ascension with his descent into memory, not altogether unusual considering how events must take at some place and that, the act of returning to those experienced places awakens certain memories. However, one must keep in mind that Toshihisa subjectively recalls his own childhood, and, necessarily, the moments he remembers involve nothing but the setting of bird traps, for instance, comparatively innocent compared to other things he took part in on the same mountain. In “Wara no ie,” Takeshi, who was friends with Toshihisa, recalls some of their times together:

Takeshi remembered how, out of all the kids who made the [Garyû] mountain their stomping grounds, the only roughnecks people were afraid of in the end were Toshihisa, who came from the orphanage, and himself, the Korean. The kids from the alley were as well behaved as could be when they [played] on the mountain in behind the alleyways.
Takeshi and Toshihisa had [once] cut down a gathering of bamboo that gradually grew thicker as you went up the mountain, and sharpened the stalks up to a fine point. Then, when they caught kids from across the tracks, they would stab them in the legs.

And, though Takeshi hadn’t taken part in it, Toshihisa had flipped over all of the fifteen headstones near the top of the mountain where the ground leveled out, ignoring the alley kids who told him to stop.48

Toshihisa might prefer the innocuous image of trapping birds to the image of stabbing kids in the leg with bamboo spears, but both show the centrality of the mountain to his childhood. At the same time, the mountain represents much more than a mere setting for events—it occupies a particular position that anchors him in time and space: “Ever since he had been born, whenever Toshihisa looked up and gazed into the distance the mountain had been there.”49 He describes the mountain as if filled with a certain power (sono yama ni chikara ga komotte iru), and he connects its existence to an old man named Morido, a recluse, who has ties to Sakura and would appear to have ties to Toshihisa as well: “The mountain, as though the wind were its breath, moved the trees. Toshihisa pictured Morido inside his house in the alley, respiring in time with the sound of the mountain’s breath.”50 The mountain, symbolic of Morido, connects all three men, and in order for Toshihisa to understand Sakura’s history, the history of Morido, their relationship to one another and to the land, particularly the Garyū Mountain, he must travel the roji like an ethnographer, piecing together stories, including his own.51

The plot of “Garyūsan” is extremely complicated, much of it going back to the Meiji Period and the 1910 High Treason Incident that left such a deep impression on Nakagami. The mountain, and the roji to a certain extent, act as a point of centrality the plot can always refer back to in order to orient itself as it moves through the time and space of the various characters’ histories, a magnetic north as it were. Since the
narratorial perspective occurs through Toshihisa, he uses the mountain in the same way as he moves backwards, unfolding those various histories, including his own. He visits the house of Old Woman Oryū (Oryū no oba), who seems to know everything about the history of the roji and the people who grew up there, in order to fill in the gaps in his knowledge. She has already shared information with him about his own lineage, showing him a picture of his mother when she was a child, but the second time he visits her he does so to get information that will shed light on Sakura’s secret:

Toshihisa went to the old woman’s house, knowing he was close to understanding Sakura’s secret, but all the old woman spoke of was, not Sakura, but Toshihisa’s mother.

She showed him that picture of his mother with her lips bent slightly upwards. “You look a lot like her don’t you think?” she asked.

Toshihisa nodded his agreement, much to the pleasure of the old woman who added, “My house is the only place where you’ll find a picture like this.”

Just then another old woman clutching a metal basin was passing by outside. Oryū called after her: “Nui! Nui!” She beckoned for the old woman to come over. “Look at this will you? Look at the young man he’s become!” She spoke in an elated voice.

Nui, with tears forming in her eyes as she looked at Toshihisa’s face, said, “I thought to myself, now where do I know him from? And I realized, that’s right, he’s Morido’s kid.”

“Morido?” Toshihisa said.

Oryū, as though trying to shut Nui’s mouth, waved her hand in objection and shifted the subject. “He’s become an important person, you know. He has his own shop and works hard,” she said.

The reader never learns for certain whether Toshihisa is actually Morido’s child or not, but the scene, particularly Oryū’s reaction as she waves her hand, implies Nui has correctly associated Toshihisa with Morido. This connection gains further credence when, after Nui continues on her way, Oryū asks Toshihisa to follow her. She takes him to see Morido.

Their meeting does not go well: Morido, isolated from people for so long, yells at them to get out, and then buries himself in his futon like a child. Left with no choice but
to leave, Oryū comments that Morido has an ill-natured heart (ijikune kokoro warui).

Toshihisa, however, disagrees, and, moreover, unlike other people, he tends to empathize with Morido:

> No one in the alley wanted to touch directly upon Morido’s story, but if you were to gather all the stories told by people here and there in the alley, Morido’s life naturally came up.

> Perhaps Morido was a lucky child, because Juntarō and Yae [Morido’s parents] never had to go out to work. Morido used to cry a lot. On days when it rained, the water level frequently rose and various places in the alley turned into a soggy mire, but everyone remembered how Juntarō walked in it, submerged up to his ankles in the mud, carrying Morido on his back. No, there were also people who said that it wasn’t Morido Juntarō was carrying on his back as he went around in the mud, but Sakura’s father.55

Morido doubles as the alley’s greatest common factor in all of the rumors and gossip that run rampant through the roji.56 Further, the tale Toshihisa recites describes him as a mythical entity: he is an auspicious child (fukuko) and the fact that he cries a lot appears connected to the floods that turn the alley into a mire. Just like the mountain he is a repository of memories and an ontological source for the people of the roji. The alternate rumors that place Sakura’s father on Juntarō’s shoulders do not undermine this, but rather suggest that he is perhaps Sakura’s father as well. Toshihisa, in exploring this memory and its potential repercussions, lays out a genealogical reconstruction, not only of the roji, but, because of his (highly probable) relation to Morido, of himself as well.

Like any good gumshoe, Toshihisa understands intuitively that in investigating place, even the embodied place of Morido, he has begun to unfold the tightly wrapped narrative riddle of the mountain and the alley. It obsesses him, and yet he seems not to suspect, or not want to suspect, his own role in it:

> Toshihisa wanted to know everything about the mountain and the alley. He [already] knew things up to a point, [but couldn’t understand] what Sakura
was thinking about now. He understood Sakura’s aim in taking out the aerial photograph and ordering him to climb up Garyū and think about [the issue].

The mountain and alley with a population of just under 40,000 were smack in the middle of this confining land, surrounded in all four directions by the ocean, the mountains, and rivers—together they made up a place gushing with the sweet nectar [of wealth]. If the land before the station went for two million yen for four square yards now, that two million would seem like a trifling amount compared to the price of the land once they had razed the mountain and completely erased the alley. [In place of the alley and mountain] they would raise buildings and department stores.

He could see people gathering here and there, prowling about for land concessions. These people, trying to gather up all these land rights, wanted more arson fires just like the one that occurred in front of the train station. No, there also were frequently fires in the past. Toshihisa wanted to clear up the riddle behind that mountain shaped like a crouching dragon, the mountain people had named Garyū. 57

Though arson fires have already begun to consume areas of the roji, Sakura makes it clear he first wants to level the remainder of the mountain. The land—both mountain and roji—were previously in his family’s possession, but his father gave away the land to the poor. He despises his father for doing that, but even more so, he hates the people of the roji for their indifference to his uncle, who worked to help them. Sakura views the destruction of the mountain and the alleyway as a means of getting revenge on the people of the alleyway, and he has had to gradually work, through duplicitous means, to get that land back into his possession. 58

The process of uncovering Sakura’s obsession with the mountain, his violent disposition towards it, ineluctably involves Toshihisa touching upon and encountering his own past. Toshihisa describes this latter process, not as an excavation of past, but as a welling up of it—his own violent nature, which he fears and has accordingly repressed, manifests itself as a “fever” (netsubyō) and/or “mass” (katamari) that he can perceive gradually working its way to his body’s surface. It reveals itself, chiefly, when he drives:
Toshihisa passed three cars in front of him. It was a no-passing zone. He accelerated some more. There was something inside him that was showing itself, gradually taking shape. It forced him to increase [the car's] speed. He wanted to sharpen that thing hardening up inside him, sharpen it to a point and thrust it forward all at once.\textsuperscript{59}

This is the first time that Toshihisa makes mention of the “thing hardening inside him” \textit{(jibun no uchigawa ni katamatte kuru mono)}, but, in spite of the description that lends it a concrete image, he describes it in extremely vague and amorphous terms; the only thing clearly expressed is the phallic violence of it, akin to the bamboo spear which the young Toshihisa uses to stab other children. Later on he connects this mass to the land, particularly to fixed notions of place:

He turned right. Who in the world was he? The road, once it began to run along the ocean, continued on in a straight line. Both the ocean and sky were blue, but neither held Toshihisa's interest. Music was pouring out of the radio, harsh against his ears—he turned it off.

Toshihisa felt bound up by some kind of powerful force—it kept him here in this land. No, he was the land itself. Each time he drove away from it, he could feel the land, just as though it was a feverish mass that spread out from his throat down to his stomach. The mass-like thing—it had been there before, when he lost his mother and was taken in by the house of his distant relative in Hirokado; and it had been there when he had gone back and forth between the orphanage and the house in Hirokado. When he embraced Hatano, when he slept with his secretary—it had been there, too. People spoke of him as a kind man, but, for Toshihisa, that kindness reflected off the somberness of his eyes.\textsuperscript{60}

On the one hand, these passages represent additional instances of the natural space and space of the \textit{roji} dominating as narrative over the characters and engendering violence, as discussed in the previous chapter; but, on the other hand, that does not preclude the possibility of place playing a similar role since it too is suffused with such narratives.

Space may constitute or contribute to this feverish-like thing, but place provides its means of articulation: “The mountain was slowly beckoning awake the terror that had spread itself throughout his body.”\textsuperscript{61} The terror (\textit{kyōfu}) Toshihisa senses is the same thing
as the fever building inside him *(netsubyō to wa kyōfu no koto datta)*, and it is also a fear of what that fever signifies: namely, his violent self. That violence fully awakens in the final pages of the story. In other words, the more he reconstructs of himself, the more embedded memories come together to form the scaffolding of narrative, and the closer his own protean narrative of violence comes to overwhelming him. The spatial narrative that engenders violence has calcified in Toshihisa in the form of a tumor-like growth, symbolic of the brutality he knew intimately as a child, and it has begun to malignantly spread.

In the final pages of the story, Hatano again begins to relentlessly whip Toshihisa with reminders of the person he used to be—the person she believes he still is—and, in a blind rage, he strangles her, not realizing what he has done until he wakes up: “He woke to the sound of a siren and suddenly realized he had been sleeping with a cord wound around both of his hands. Toshihisa let go of it. Next to him, lying prostrate with the cord wrapped around her neck was Hatano.” Toshihisa then takes a plastic container filled with kerosene and gradually pours its contents over a stove in the corner of the kitchen all the way to the kitchen door. Standing there, he sets fire to a bundle of newspaper and lights this wick of fuel, watching for a moment as the flames crawl from the floor up to the ceiling.

It is not the land or the place of the mountain that forces him, in the end, to repeat himself, but Hatano’s relentless reminders of his delinquent childhood. In his struggle to keep the narrative of his past self safely contained, Toshihisa has had to resort to the exact violence that characterizes it. He represses his own history, but in trying to understand the position of place in Sakura’s life and its position within the community’s
memory, he comes full circle to its meaning in his, to an image of his mother in a picture, the possibility of Morido as his father, and himself as he existed as a child, violent and cruel—the very past he would have rather forgotten.

The mountain is located between the city of Komoriku and the alley, a place in between two worlds, like Toshihisa; it has a strange power for him, but only because it marks his experience so deeply, rising up as a reference point for narrative. Because of this it also acts as a reservoir of memory and experience for Toshihisa and for others, like Toshihisa’s cousin. While it has already been mostly destroyed—only the portion once known as Naga remains—it can never be completely erased: the process of rememory prevents that. Toshihisa continues to run into the place of the mountain, and his own history with that place. At every turn of the corner it is there, waiting for him.

Edward Said wrote, “To repeat a life is not to produce another life; it is to place death where life had been.” Similarly, Toshihisa, in repeating the narrative violence that characterized his childhood, ends the life of the man people had thought he had become. The remapping of origin, Nakagami appears to be saying, yields repetition of it, but it is a repetition accompanied by renewed awareness. Toshihisa sets fire to Hatano’s house in order to cover up his crime, and while watching the fire crawl along the ceiling and floor “he thought to himself that his eyes were still somber, even as they reflected the blaze.” The “somberness of his eyes” (me no kurasa) is an expression Nakagami employs quite frequently. Toshihisa spends much of the story trying to hide from this, but in the end, he understands that not even the bright flames of a blaze can burn that darkness away. He may have returned to the brutality of his youth, but, like Akiyuki in Misaki, he has tried to confront that origin, rather than run from it.
4.2.3 The Rediscovery of Difference in “Wara no ie”

The plot of “Wara no ie” does not share the same level of complexity as “Garyûsan,” nor does its protagonist, Takeshi, contain the depth of Toshihisa, but the situation in which he finds himself, uncovering origin as he repeats a past narrative, evokes the circumstances of both Toshihisa and Akiyuki. Like Toshihisa, Takeshi has grown up in the roji but, in his adulthood, has left it behind. As a result he feels dislocated and disconnected from the site of the roji (roji to muen da), even as he returns to it: “As he walked, Takeshi felt that, in spite of having grown up there [in the alley], he was permanently cut off from it.” Further, though he once made it his home, he expresses the desire to see it destroyed: “Takeshi had thought [for some time] he would like to see the fire that would burn down the alleyway. He hardly had any good memories of it at all.” The connection between his memory of the roji and the desire to see it destroyed stems from his unpleasant childhood, particularly his home life and the absence of his parents.

Takeshi keeps the fetidness of those childhood experiences fresh in him, preserving them in a brine of anger and hatred. The destruction of the roji would figuratively eradicate those unpleasant memories, leaving him, in a sense, cleansed of his past. This would also, however, amount to what Karatani and Lefebvre have discussed as the repression of the process of formation, the repression of origin. The roji, metaphorically speaking, has birthed Takeshi, and as “Wara no ie” moves steadily towards the demolition of it, starting with Garyû Mountain, one would expect this normalizing process to begin as well, yet the opposite actually takes place.
As the story advances to Garyû’s demise, Takeshi, rather than experience an erasure of origin, actually becomes more and more aware of it, particularly of his difference as a Japanese-born Korean. This has to do with his relationship to a woman, more than twenty years older than he and never named, who lives in the alley, and with whom he has an affair. Takeshi, who lives outside the alley with his wife Hatsue and their two children, must constantly return to the roji, the site of his birth, in order to meet this woman. But this is more than a figurative return to home: in actuality, as the narrator tells us, “the woman’s house was on the outskirts of the alley and the house he had been raised in was behind hers.” All of their meetings take place at the woman’s house and so each one intimately binds itself to his origins—the woman, in fact, becomes a symbol of that origin. Additionally, sexual intercourse with the woman allows Takeshi to recognize “difference”:

The woman was wearing flower-patterned panties that didn’t suit her age. His finger, inserted deep beneath her skirt, came upon them. She did just as Takeshi told her, arched her back and spread her thighs, allowing his finger to touch freely upon both her pubic hair and vagina. The woman knit her brows, and groaned softly in pain. Watching her, something like anger suddenly began to boil in him. He didn’t know why he should have such feelings for the woman.

Once she removed her clothes he understood [why]: her nipples were still red like a young girl’s and there were no stretch marks on her abdomen like there were on Hatsue’s. He noticed that her body had more loose fat than Hatsue’s, but not in a negative way. She differed from Hatsue in all respects.

Takeshi notes here the differences between his wife, Hatsue, and the woman, almost as though he expected them to be the same. Also, perhaps more importantly, he feels anger, directed at the woman, building in him (hara-dachi no yôna mono ga waite kuru) as they have sex. This anger has its roots in her “difference”: although the woman is said to be in her forties, her nipples are red like a young girl’s (chikubi ga musume no yôni akaku) and she has loose fat (shibô no tarumi), which also recalls a person in her youth; she wears
panties not suited for her age (*toshi ni niawanai*) and appears never to have had children as no stretch marks can be seen on her body (*ninshin-sen wa doko ni mo nakatta*). Based on these traits, and what could be said to be a youthful appetite for sex, the woman represents everything she should not be or, rather, she unseats Takeshi’s preconceived notion of what she should be. In her forties she is old enough to be Takeshi’s mother and yet she displays characteristics and the behavior of someone perhaps his age or younger. Thus she symbolizes origin, embodied as a maternal figure that outwardly shows no sign of that maternity. This disjunction is the basis for Takeshi’s anger, but it also makes him aware of difference, not simply between his wife and his lover, but in the much broader sense, including his own as a Korean amongst Japanese.

Takeshi has not cognitively noted this difference in the passage above, but as the story progresses this awareness not only manifests itself, it also intensifies. The more he comes to understand his birth as a Korean in Japan, the more he perceives a rift in himself:

[His wife] hadn’t been all that surprised when she learned Takeshi was Korean. When he had asked her to marry him she agreed quickly and neither had her parents objected. Yet Takeshi somehow felt that something was lacking in Hatsue. In the end, he perceived that dissatisfaction with respect to himself as well. He had Korean parents and he was born a Korean in Japan, yet he could not even speak it. He could understand everyday [conversational] language—his parents used it while talking with their fellow Korean neighbors and when they wanted to keep something secret, so he had opportunities to hear it, but it was a mother tongue he had never had the need to use.73

For Hatsue and her parents, Takeshi’s heritage appears never to have been an issue, something perhaps unusual given the history of relations between the Japanese-born Koreans and the Japanese. In other words, his difference is effaced in his relationship with her and this leads to his perception of her as lacking something (*mono-tarinai*). He
perceives the same lack in himself because he has not nurtured that difference, his
Korean language for instance, but, rather, assimilated easily into the larger Japanese
language and culture. In effect, he has given himself over to the narrative of himself as
Japanese at the cost of his Korean heritage. His relationship with the woman, emblematic
of his relationship with the roji as place, helps to evoke the disparity between these
aspects of his identity.

Takeshi has no knowledge about Korea, a situation which would not have
bothered him prior to his encounter with the woman, but, now that he has met her, he has
become keenly aware of it. The woman serves as a focalizer, drawing attention to the fact
that he is a Korean living among Japanese or, rather, a Korean trying to live as a Japanese.
As though trying to make up for all the time he had neglected his heritage, he finds
himself, when he is with the woman, drawing his Korean identity up tightly around him:

Takeshi didn’t know anything about Korea, and he had never wanted to know
anything about it. His parents had never talked to each other about the old days
nor did they speak of it with Takeshi. He felt, rather, that they acted [as though]
you didn’t want to discuss it.

Ever since Takeshi was a child, his father had never been inclined to
talk—not even when he was at home during the New Year holidays or during the
Bon Festival, or even when he hurt himself and had to miss work—he just sat in
the house drinking saké. His mother, however, could talk on and on, as long as it
was about the stories of hardship she experienced in running the barbeque stand.

When he was with Hatsue he had never thought of himself as a Korean,
but when he stood before the woman, he was self-conscious of it. He didn’t
understand why that should be. Perhaps because the woman lived next door to the
house where his mother and father lived, and, again, it might be that, mingled in
with the woman’s behavior [towards him], was the feeling that Takeshi was
racially different. He knew that whenever he stopped by her house she would try
to accommodate his mood. When he was before her, he was arrogant, as though
he had suddenly transformed into a nationalist. He found his changes [in
temperament] strange.74

Again, Takeshi finds himself comparing his wife to the woman. His wife’s acceptance of
him as Korean, something one would typically take as a positive, is overturned as a
negative here exactly because it also homogenizes. The woman, in contrast, stands in a
privileged position because, at least obliquely, she emphasizes the difference in Takeshi.
This has to do with the woman as a maternal site, a site which provides the opportunity
for things to come into being, and also reflects the place of the roji as a site that has
birthed difference. This is again part of Nakagami’s ambivalent project: although the roji,
in terms of both space and place, acts as a narrative of control, it also clearly
distinguishes and inevitably acknowledges difference. The roji as system must be
removed, but the difference that it recognizes should not disappear with it, hence
characters like Takeshi have a complex and equivocal attitude towards the roji, both as a
space that structures them and as a place invested with their formative experiences.

Already one can see that Takeshi’s recovery of origin does not necessarily
culminate in a progressive logic: difference awakens in him feelings of nationalism
(minzoku-shugi) and, correspondingly, anger (hara-dachi) towards those unlike him. Also,
in certain respects, Takeshi recovers origin by repeating the narrative of his parents.
Takeshi’s parents worked throughout his childhood and were not at home, an experience
that scarred his childhood, and left him with intense, and still unresolved, issues of anger
towards them. Yet Takeshi himself has a family to support, both financially and
physically, with his presence in the house. His affair with the woman keeps him away
from home, reproducing at least the absence of his own father during his childhood. Also,
he takes off work frequently in order to spend time with the woman in the roji, no doubt
limiting the amount of money for his household. He does not believe his wife knows or
even suspects his affair, but certainly things cannot continue along their current path
without her eventually discovering the illicit relationship. His indirect search for origin
has led to a rediscovery of difference, but it has also activated the narrative of his childhood.

4.4 Conclusion: Place, Narrative, and Rememory

The situation of the burakumin is one historically defined by space. Many have discussed the origins of the burakumin as clouded in mystery and have struggled to trace their genealogy to a separate race, but the fact that no such evidence has ever been found only proves that their origins are no different from other Japanese; one is termed burakumin, not because of blood, but because of where one has been located. Ideology, hegemony, or what Nakagami calls monogatari controls spatial practice so that it projects into all aspects of social practice: class, the division of labor, gender, ethnicity, etc. “Space commands bodies, prescribing or proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered,” Lefebvre tells us, “It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its raison d’etre.”75 This normativity carries over to the cityscape where, Elizabeth Grosz writes, “the city’s form and structure provides the context in which the social rules and expectations are internalized or habituated in order to ensure social conformity or, failing this, position social marginality at a safe distance.”76 She refers here, at the end of the passage, to the process of ghettoization, of which the roji is a prime example. Ghettos such as the roji can possibly be considered as a refuge for those living there, but one would do well to remember that it, too, as an extension of the city-space, is comprised of those social rules and societal expectations that always command those bodies marked as different. This is perhaps the reason that critics such as Karatani Kōjin have said
Nakagami does not possess a perspective on society (shakai-tekina kanten) in his writings.\(^77\)

A question that then arises regarding Nakagami’s depiction of the *roji* is: from what perspective does he write? Can one consider it a perspective of the *burakumin*? One may want to answer in the affirmative, but, as Nina Comyetz has pointed out, Nakagami’s Akiyuki narratives rarely make mention of the discrimination against the *buraku* people, nor does Nakagami refer to the characters in his stories as *burakumin*.\(^78\) The *roji* is of course a trope for the *hisabetsu buraku*, but that alone does not necessarily permit the equation of the two; rather than creating a narrative designed to make known and undo discrimination against the *burakumin*, Nakagami has the much larger ambition of targeting the system of discrimination that makes situations and conditions such as the *buraku* possible.\(^79\)

Nakagami approaches the *roji* through protagonists who, frequently, grew up there, left, and now feel alienated from it. Take, for example, Toshihisa’s comments as he walks through the *roji*: “People were hidden inside their houses, in the shadows of buildings, in the space between houses, and they were watching him as an outsider. That’s how he felt.”\(^80\) Alienation denotes having past ties which have presently been severed. That former presence, that past connection, renders any objective perspective an impossibility, but neither can the characters’ perspective be reduced to an instance of subjectivity. It should probably come as no surprise given the excess of ambivalence in his work that Nakagami writes from somewhere forever in-between.

Nevertheless, place is a useful concept for considering how neither objectivity nor subjectivity apply, or perhaps how they both apply. People locate memory in places, and
the protagonists of Nakagami’s fiction are no exception: the roji, the woman’s house in its outskirts, and the Garyū mountain are all localizations of experience. The recollection of those experiences in order to construct a past in the present—what I have labeled “rememory”—also recalls a specific place as it once existed, along with a particular time and space. But this place does not contain memories solely in relation to the individual; place shares itself with the collective and the individual that helps comprise it. Malpas’s philosophical reading of place reflects this: “To remain within the purely subjective [place] would be to remain within the realm of loss and displacement alone—the regaining of ‘lost time’, the regaining of a life, is the regaining of a sense of the reality of things that transcends the subjective and that encompasses the particular locations, persons, objects, actions and events.” Similarly, Nakagami is never alone because he must always keep Japanese tradition with him.

Nakagami’s texts do, to a certain extent, detail the “realm of loss”: one only has to consider Mie, Akiyuki’s older sister, who longs for a past when her brother and father still lived. Nostalgia looks back to a past necessarily stable and fixed in the mind, and this is perhaps why people consider it such a dangerous act, not only because of its futility, but because it seeks to displace the time of the present. Mie’s act inevitably fails, but in other cases—whether it be Akiyuki, Takeshi, or Toshihisa—memory does not seek to return to the way things once were; rather it is a form of “remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.” Such a transformation makes place “forever open to contestation” and, thus, it affects and effects the collective (objective) world. This transformation, though described in seemingly positive terms above, also works harshly
on the individual (subjective) level, contesting identity and overwhelming, at times, protagonists like Akiyuki, Toshihisa, and Takeshi.

The past, although necessary for Nakagami, also forms another aspect of deterministic narrative. As a narrative it structures “both memory and self-identity, as well as the places, the landscapes, in which self identity is itself worked out and established.”84 Thus it is “determinative in the organisation of self and mind” and “determinative of our understanding of the world and in the possibility of action, and so, through action, of the places in which action is possible.”85 As Michel de Certeau writes: “Sites are fragmentary and convoluted histories, pasts stolen by others from readability, folded up ages that can be unfolded but that are there more as narratives in suspense, like a rebus: symbolizations encysted in the body’s pain or pleasure.”86 If one takes “site” here to mean “place,” then, in questioning the identity of place, unfolding that folded up narrative, Nakagami’s characters search out origin and return to readability certain repressed pasts. Additionally, this process of recovery involves the characters exploring the roots of their own self-identity, an act that carries with it the possibility of altering narrative. Texts themselves participate in the formation of social memory and Nakagami’s texts constantly remind us that such a possibility does not come easily. The deterministic narrative may shift, just wide enough to register a difference, but at a cost that gives the reader pause—grounds to suspect that the new narrative path will carry to a familiar place, and reason to continuously doubt the efficacy of change.
5.1 Introduction

"Wouldn’t you like to see everything burn down into fields like before?" – Hatano to Toshihisa in “Garyūsan”¹

Nakagami’s fictions unfold with deep ambivalence, and nowhere can one see that more clearly than in the destruction of the alleyway (roji no shōmetsu). That destruction takes place, for the most part, in Chi no hate shijō no toki, but it starts much earlier, in stories like “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie.”² These two short stories offer, in a sense, a microcosm of Chi no hate shijō no toki, a glimpse at the cumulative point one phase that Nakagami’s work strives to reach. Once the roji vanishes under the weight of urban revitalization, Nakagami’s stories no longer have the space of the roji to rely upon, they shift settings and “move from Shingū to Shinjuku” with works like Nichirin no tsubasa.³ In essence, his roji narratives, once the roji has been reduced to a memory, focus on diasporic groups ejected from their space.

By the end of “Wara no ie,” fires consume the roji and heavy machines chew away at the remnants of Garyū Mountain. One could say that a repressive narrative system, one instantiation of discrimination, comes to an end. Nakagami’s project would ostensibly be complete. However, in place of this narrative comes another. In other words, although the roji vanishes, its destruction does not result in the destruction of a discriminatory space; it only creates a gaping hole from which a new “roji” can emerge. That new “roji” takes the form of capitalism, the department store and supermarkets that Sakura and others want to erect in the places they have leveled. Further, Sakura, who
leads the formation of this new narrative, also functions as an emperor-like figure, leaving more than ample space for Nakagami’s readers to question the efficacy of his project—whether he succeeds in overturning a conception of narrative, undermines it, or merely replaces it with something equally oppressive or worse.

5.2 The Emperor System and Capital

The anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao has argued that kingship in Japan is dual-leveled structure that “incorporates marginality as well as centrality.” He explains that, the king of ancient Japan … was a stranger to the society that he ruled. Although the king had the duty of integrating the whole nation, by establishing the political order, he could not manifest his force directly, because it could be antisocial if it were manifested without modification. Herein lies the dilemma of kingship: to be integral it has to represent negative elements as well as positive ones … The mythical dimension is introduced to solve this type of dilemma.

Yamaguchi cites the story of the god Susano-o as told in the Kojiki (The Record of Ancient Matters, 712) and Nihongi (The Chronicle of Japan, 720) as a prototype for the sort of myth he has in mind. Susano-o, one of the children of Izanagi, is entrusted with ruling over the plain of the Ocean, but only throws a tantrum in response: he sulks, crying and howling, and refuses to rule over the land allotted to him. Izanagi, irritated by his behavior, orders him exiled to the netherworld. Before leaving, however, Susano-o asks for permission to visit his sister Amaterasu, the sun goddess, in heaven, and see her one final time. He is granted permission, but once there he proceeds to cause trouble for her, angering her so much that she seals herself into a cave, plunging the world into darkness. After the deities successfully persuade Amaterasu to come back out, they decided to punish Susano-o by exiling him from heaven. Susano-o binds grasses to make a hat and cloak for himself and, unable to receive shelter from any of the gods, descends to earth in
the middle of a rainstorm. Eventually, after much wandering, he establishes a dynasty in Izumo.

Put simply, the prince, in this case Susano-o, exiled for his deeds, operates within a marginal position, which balances and maintains the centrality of the king or emperor’s position. Although Susano-o actually deserved punishment for his actions, the archetypal prince can also be scapegoated and similarly forced into a marginal position. One can, Yamaguchi argues, see the same process occurring in the legend of Semimaru as told in the medieval no play by the same name. Semimaru, born blind, is a source of shame for his father, the Engi Emperor, and sent to the Osaka Barrier to live out his life in exile.

The emperor further orders that he be given the identity of a wandering monk, complete with hat, cloak, and biwa (lute). In this description alone he bears striking resemblance to the god Susano-o, and even though he has a house, unlike Susano-o, it is a house made of straw.

Before proceeding to Sakura and how he fits into this narrative, one must first point out some striking connections to “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” the latter of which conjures up images of these myths, particularly Semimaru, in its title, “House of Straw.” Additionally, Morido, like Semimaru, has a physical handicap—his cloven hand—and he spends his days sealed away inside his room, out of society’s sight. He also refuses to leave his bed, mirroring Susano-o’s own inactivity when given stewardship over the subterranean land; and, though he does not appear to be grieving for his mother, Morido often cries (nageku) and howls (umeku), his tears at one point appearing to flood the roji. This has another connection with Susano-o, whose frequent crying, according to the Nihon shoki, has the exact opposite effect, causing the green mountains to wither.
Moreover, Morido is the scapegoat for the roji, the one whose death will allow Sakura to execute his plan for the Garyū Mountain:

Toshihisa felt that the entire alleyway respiring like the rise and fall of Morido’s stomach—Morido, now lying in bed with his cloven cow’s hoof. In Toshihisa’s eyes Morido seemed like something else, like a power that surpassed that of the gods’. Toshihisa felt that both Sakura and Satomi, all the people who wanted to erase the mountain and tear away the alleyway that had been built on Sakura’s land, were waiting for Morido to stop breathing.9

“Garyūsan” also reveals that Morido and Sakura are related, though in exactly what way the reader never knows for certain. Most people assume they are cousins, but other rumors have it that they are brothers or perhaps even father and son. Nevertheless, Morido most closely resembles the prince exiled to the periphery, and Sakura the king or emperor that depends upon that marginality to maintain his image of centrality. This does not, however, preclude Sakura from containing his own marginal characteristics.

As quoted above, the king must be a stranger to the society that he rules, and, paralleling this, Sakura has withdrawn from society: he keeps his shutters sealed shut (amado o akehanatanai) and stays secluded throughout the day (shūjitsu ie ni hikikomoru).10 However, Yamaguchi’s emperor embodies marginality through myth, unable to embody it in the profane world. For Sakura, the situation is reversed: he incorporates marginality in the profane—through his relationship with Morido—and centrality through rumors, gossip, or what could be termed “myth.” The only reason Toshihisa keeps company with him lies in the fact that “Sakura seemed to come to life, rising up out of gossip” (uwasa no naka kara okiagari ikikaetta yōni aru).11

Since he rarely leaves his house, people in the roji can only know Sakura through rumors that have shaped him into a dangerous and powerful person. Ironically, a large rift exists between this constructed image and how he appears in Toshihisa’s eyes: “Everyone
knew that Sakura was a treacherous character. However, there was a world of difference between that image of him and how he actually appeared in reality. He had none of the masculine characteristics [that rumor said he had, like] working in the shadows to knock off a business competitor.” Rumors also tend to conflict, stirring up the sediment of Sakura’s history into a muddled confusion: “There were numerous rumors regarding Sakura. There were so many that even Toshihisa, right next to him, couldn’t tell which ones were true and which ones were lies.” Such confusion only deepens Sakura’s mythical characteristics, making him that much more of an unknown to the people of the roji just as the emperor was (and still is, to a certain extent) to the people of Japan. The entire area around the roji is described as a “land where gossip runs rampant” (uwasa ga hashiru tochi da), which allows rumor to act as another totalizing force. Sakura can, in turn, invoke fear because he rises up out of it, but, for Toshihisa, he takes on a rather different shape.

On more than one occasion Toshihisa comments that Sakura resembles a “weak, wounded creature” (yowai kizu shita dobutsu no yo datta), and he consistently describes him as feminine, particularly in the way that he speaks, which Toshihisa likens to a woman possessed (mono ni tsukareta yō ni hanasu onna no yōna kuchō). If Sakura is possessed by anything it is by his own past, the spirits of his ancestors: his father, grandfather, and uncle—the men who lie deeply embedded in the modern history of the alleyway.

During the Meiji Period (1868-1912), Sakura’s family owned the land of the roji and the Garyû Mountain, but his father, influenced by the “new thought” (shin-shisō) of the time, sold the land to the poor, allowing them to turn the mountain into terraced rice
fields. Sakura appears to have spent a good portion of his adulthood working to get all the property back into his possession in order to right this “wrong.” This facet of Sakura’s history has another connection with Yamaguchi’s emperor or king: “The king, in fact, suffers because of the sin committed by the mythical royal ancestor,” Yamaguchi writes, “Kingship continues to exist because it integrates order with chaos … Kingship becomes the cause as well as the remedy for all this disorder.”17 His father’s “sin” occurs when he gives the land away to the poor; the father, in a sense, gives away the legacy of the grandfather, Totsukawa, whom Sakura respects and admires deeply. Sakura’s subsequent rise to the status of an emperor-like figure represents his attempt to remedy the disorder, reacquire the legacy of his grandfather, and return things to their proper place.

Sakura’s family also occupies a mythical place in the modern history of the roji. His father has written a song, repeated throughout the story, which has embedded itself in the collective consciousness of the alleyway: If you look at Naga from Hiyori, it’s a horse—barebacked, without even a saddle (Hiyori yama kara Naga yama mireba hadaka-uma ka yo kura mo nai).18 Toshihisa and Sakura both observe that one cannot see any of the signs of new thought, so prevalent at the time, anywhere in the song; rather, the song “sounds like someone climbing to a high point and claiming he has the most wealth” (takai tokoro ni nobotte ichiban washi ga kane-mochi ya to iutoru mitai-ni kikoeru).19 In other words, the song sounds more like someone gloating over his money, and it also connects Sakura’s father with the imperial ritual of kunimi: he has climbed to a high point to boast as it were. This establishes a faux imperial lineage for Sakura and a sin for him to rectify.
This lineage dates back to Sakura’s grandfather, the person Sakura respects the most, who also haunts Sakura the most assiduously, pursuing him even into his dreams:

As soon as he looked into Toshihisa’s face, Sakura said, “I had been dozing until just a while ago and the whole time I was having this dream.” His voice was cheerfully high-pitched. “My father and grandfather were there, and they both praised me, telling me how hard I had worked. Some time ago my grandfather Totsukawa was the most important person around and the best liked, and, I can’t remember why, but seeing him praise me, I felt so happy.”

As he stared at Toshihisa’s face, Sakura began to talk as though his high voice, shaking slightly, had reached a point of rapture. “I wonder if my grandfather was praising me for getting back all the Totsukawa mountains before they were developed. It wasn’t easy to buy them all back between the High Treason Incident and my pop selling them off.”

In buying back the land of the alleyway and the mountain, he has begun to correct the sin of his predecessor’s by returning the land, rightfully his, to his family’s possession. He does so, however, through underhanded and disruptive means, most notably through arson fires, which, at first, would seem likely to drive the roji into chaos: “There was no question what the landowner Sakura would do: just as the various rumors from long ago had it, he would erase the alleyway and level the mountain by legal means or illegal ones.” Yet this chaos quickly gives way to order: Sakura is always there to buy the land back from those whose houses and businesses he has just burned to the ground, thereby unifying the land under one property owner and, in a sense, domesticating the disorder to which he has given birth. On a certain level, one can conclude that he fulfills the role of the emperor as Yamaguchi describes it.

The portrayal of Sakura begins to open up interesting possibilities as to what Nakagami may have been trying to accomplish by relating him to the pre-modern emperor figure. As discussed earlier, other imperial characteristics appear within Nakagami’s fiction, most notably mimetic acts of kunimi. In these scenes Akiyuki and
Toshihisa undermine the imperial position because of their location in society, but, at the same time, they never remove that position, only try to replace it. Tomotsune Tsutomu notes this exact ambivalence when he writes:

... Nakagami’s project of de-narrativization and reestablishing narrative did not aim to eliminate the emperor but to rearticulate the imperial system. He never abandoned his admiration for the emperor although he recognized that it is the emperor system that implicitly provides the hierarchical order and the key for viewing the buraku as defiled.\(^\text{22}\)

Whether Nakagami “admired” the emperor is open to debate, but Tomotsune’s point that Nakagami never eliminates, only rearticulates, the imperial system cannot be stressed enough. Additionally, Tomotsune’s statement that the emperor system provides the means for viewing the buraku as defiled is well taken, but also bears further expansion: Nakagami does not believe the dichotomy of the emperor and the burakumin to be a simple mutually defining opposition. That is to say, he does not argue that it takes the emperor system to define the position of the burakumin and the burakumin to locate the emperor in a hierarchical structure; rather, he believes that the defiled were equivalent to the imperial family. As stated above, the emperor (king) occupies a position that incorporates characteristics of centrality and marginality. Yamaguchi Masao further comments on this dual-structure:

With the establishment of a highly hierarchical society under the ritsu-ryo (legally controlled) system, the rulers created three vertically ordered social categories: the venerable (ki), consisting of the imperial family and the aristocrats; the good (ryo), consisting of the peasants; and the base (sen), comprising craftsmen, entertainers, diviners, gravediggers, and minor priests, in other words, persons engaged in Other-Worldly activities. The base were counterparts of the venerable; there was fundamentally no difference in behaviour between the two categories.\(^\text{23}\)

Yamaguchi’s pre-modern “base” corresponds to the eta class or buraku people of the Edo and modern periods. The burakumin, historically, performed such tasks as grave digging,
tomb construction and tomb guarding, not to mention other such defiling tasks. Just as the emperor incorporates characteristics of marginality, the *burakumin* incorporate features of the “venerable” position—by dealing with defiled tasks like leatherwork and not outwardly suffering for it, they acquired otherworldly status similar to the emperor, who gained his status through myth. Yet the fact that Sakura, as an emperor figure, does win out would at first seem to go against the expectations one would have in reading the marginal fiction of someone like Nakagami. Aspects such as this are most likely what has led some people to term Nakagami “right wing” or an “emperor worshipper” (*uyoku de ten’no-shugisha*). Nevertheless, affixing such labels to Nakagami perhaps goes too far; he certainly perceived the emperor system as irremovable and irreducible, but his stance, at least within his fiction, is far too ambivalent to allow any such unequivocal statement. For instance, one can never fully equate Sakura with the emperor figure: as Tomotsune points out above, Sakura is always a re-articulation of the imperial position, and that re-articulation must be considered on its own terms.

Sakura, obsessed with his own lineage, attempts to buy up the land of the alleyway and mountain in order to restore what he views as his rightful inheritance, ostensibly not in the least concerned with profiting off it. Still, Sakura is more than aware of the potential fortune the land represents. At one point he challenges Toshihisa to estimate the value of the mountain and alleyway:

“You all’d probably say [the land would go for] as much as five or ten billion yen, but for me it’s worth ten yen. I wouldn’t sell it if the city asked me to, but let’s say for the time being that it is worth five billion. Why would I say land that is probably worth five billion is equivalent to ten yen? Because I don’t have any intention of selling it. It’s always been in my family, up until my grandfather’s generation. My pop and uncle were idiots doing that thing [i.e., selling it off to the poor].”
Toshihisa believes Sakura’s initial interest in the land does not involve profit (rieki nuki), but he does not necessarily believe that Sakura does not want to capitalize off the land somehow: “He [Toshihisa] knew from the very beginning that Sakura’s obsession with Naga Mountain and the land around it had nothing to do with profit. However, the fact that he continued to dwell on it would, also, bear profit. Sakura didn’t want to speak about that aspect, however.”27 Sakura may refuse to sell the land to the government, but he does so only because he has an alternative that could yield even more money than the city would pay. Nakagami reveals this alternative in “Wara no ie,” with the introduction of another character, Kuwahara.

One can perhaps interpret Kuwahara as another instance of the emperor-figure in line with Yamaguchi’s thesis—like Sakura, Kuwahara goes unseen by the people of Komoriku, occupying a marginal position. Yet neither does he appear to the reader; instead, he floats on the gossip and rumors. Overall he would seem to be an extension of Sakura, an entrepreneurial half who owns a chain of successful supermarkets in Komoriku and wants to expand his business by building a large department store:

And that’s where Sakura’s obsession with alleyway’s land and the mountain and Komoriku’s economic development plan came into play. About fifty contracting groups, large and small, located in Komoriku, swarmed to the new downtown district plan to remove the alleyway and mountain and add two roads running to the supermarket through the middle of the now vacant land of the alleyway: one road from the train station and another from the road where city hall was. The downtown district plan ignored the voices of the people in the alleyway, leaving them sacrificial victims, and once it passed through the city council the fires began to break out.28

Kuwahara’s plan works in tandem with Sakura’s plan for the roji. Once they have the city’s approval to remove Garyû Mountain, they move on to the next target, the roji, hiring arsonists to slowly burn it to the ground. The people of the roji remain oblivious
throughout it all: they gather together in throngs to watch in excitement when the demolition crews finally begin to work away at the mountain, impressed by the destruction.

Nakagami assumes another ironical position in his description of the roji’s destruction. His characters, frequently outsiders, often express the desire to burn down the alleyway or to see it burn, and the residents themselves actually long for this as well: “I wish Sakura and the rest would burn this alleyway down.’ The people in the alleyway said this then and they said it still today.” The same applies to the remnants of Garyū Mountain, leveled in “Wara no ie”: “No one among the people of the alleyway complained [about the mountain’s destruction] and no one asked what they would do once they had bulldozed the mountain.” In fact, the people crowd around the cordoned off area and watch, thrilled, as the heavy machines dig away at the mountain. The irony is not in their excitement over its destruction, but in their excitement, suspended and preserved in a solution of wonder and ignorance, over the destruction of their own homes and land.

This deepens the ambivalent location of Sakura, and Kuwahara by association. Just as he represents an emperor figure, possessing both centripetal and marginal characteristics, Sakura’s actions cannot be boxed and labeled as wholly villainous for the simple fact that the people actually welcome the destruction of the roji. Karatani Kōjin, in discussing Sakura and Hamamura Ryūzō, Akiyuki’s father, hits upon this same facet of Sakura’s character:

[Sakura] holds a grudge against the people of the buraku who were indifferent to [the efforts of] his uncle who had labored for the burakumin and was apprehended in the frame-up that was the High Treason Incident. Their apathy comes from the fact that the hisabetsu buraku is a society formed out of defeat. The people of the
roji themselves are satisfied as long as they are compensated for the land speculation and, therefore, Sakura—who despises the people of the roji, who, through deception, takes up their land and attempts to destroy it—and his head clerk, Hamamura Ryūzō, can never be mere villains.  

Sakura possesses the ambivalence of the emperor figure—both a character of the margins and the center—and his actions contain a similar ambiguity, not wholly terrible because the people he manipulates welcome the destruction of the roji and Garyūsan. Overall, the only thing one can say for certain in analyzing Nakagami’s work is that nothing is ever certain.

5.3 Conclusion: The Next Roji

The government claims that the eradication of the roji and the bulldozing of the mountain will revitalize the area, but the construction contracts and the buildings erected only benefit the landowners and businessmen, people predominantly from outside the roji.

Capitalism becomes the new narrative and the new shape of space. This development does not leave much room for positivism in Nakagami’s texts and leaves one to wonder how his project contra narrative (monogatari) can succeed in practice when it cannot even succeed in the theory of fiction.

Again, Karatani, in discussing Chi no hate shijō no toki, touches on this facet of Nakagami’s writing when he comments on the actions of Akiyuki’s father, Hamamura Ryūzō, and Sakura, both outsiders to the roji, who ultimately destroy it in order to create something else in its space. Karatani writes:

Hamamura Ryūzō’s design [i.e., his desire to destroy the roji] is, at first glimpse, reactionary. However, one could also say that they [Ryūzō and Sakura] are unconsciously caught up in the realization of the community from which they came. The tragedy of this comes in their attempt to realize it in a thoroughly
distorted manner. In other words, they try to realize a world without discrimination by producing a world even more discriminatory.33

*Chi no hate shijō no toki* brings the Akiyuki trilogy to a close and obliterates the last physical vestiges of the *roji*, but one can also perceive the *roji*'s end prior to that in stories “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” including the tragedy of which Karatani speaks: that the *roji*, a discriminatory space, is torn down only to be replaced by a space that will discriminate with even greater intensity. For Nakagami, capitalism appears to have been the only force strong enough to eradicate the *roji*, but it does not offer any better alternatives to it, or to the narrative Nakagami appears so bent against in “Monogatari no keifu.”

At the start of his essay on Tanizaki Jun’ichirō in “Monogatari no keifu,” Nakagami compares narrative to Pandora’s box. “When you open it,” he writes, “what leaps out is another narrative that narrative has made.”34 The *roji* is just one such narrative that, when Nakagami opened to its own destruction, allowed another narrative to leap out. Clearly, this is a problem and not a solution, but perhaps we are not supposed to view it as anything else or as anything less. Yomota Inuhiko, in a conversation held only a few months after Nakagami’s death, recounts traveling through Harlem, New York, with Nakagami. As they walked about the city, Nakagami turned to him and said, “This is the *roji*. Do you see that?”35 What Nakagami challenged Yomota to see was that the *roji* exists, not only in Shingū, but throughout the world, just like narrative. Yomota further suggests that:

Rather than ask whether his [Nakagami’s] solution was mistaken or not, I prefer to think that Nakagami was someone who introduced us to an exceptional problem. I believe, for instance, that he did us a great favor in calling our attention to these various places, after his version of the *roji* had vanished, and telling us
that they, too, are the roji; and I believe we must keep looking at these [instances of the] roji.36

One issue that Nakagami wanted to make explicit concerns this issue of spatio-temporal universality—the ubiquity of the roji as a space and its inherent irreducibility. Like the emperor-system, any attempt to remove the roji (or, perhaps more accurately, a roji) only results in a re-articulation, and, to take Yomota’s suggestion a step further, Nakagami calls on us to examine, not only other instances of the roji, but these re-articulations of it as it inevitably alters form. Nakagami’s texts cannot be instruction manuals on how to deal with such a problem; they can only call our attention to it because, as of now, we simply do not have the means to solve it.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

As previously discussed, critics divide Nakagami’s fiction into *setsuwa*-like tales that use a pre-modern landscape, and the *roji* narratives, those that focus on modern-day cityscapes and ghettos. However, the *roji* narratives carry on long after the *roji* itself is gone; they move on to diasporic groups, and perhaps, if Nakagami had lived longer, towards a solution to the problems he presented us. The *roji*, then, only occupies one phase of Nakagami’s writing and, moreover, it was a phase Nakagami did not actively pursue until the actual *roji*—the *buraku*—was about to be destroyed.

Nakagami’s *roji* is always an abject space: it contains violence and disorder, characteristics of the periphery, but also a raw power alive with difference. At the same time, his space can only exist because of the presence of a center, and this does not go unacknowledged, by either Nakagami or his protagonists. His characters intuitively understand that space itself is subsumed into what Nakagami terms “narrative,” or what could also be called, plainly, discrimination (*sabetsu*). Nakagami thought of discrimination as an inherent problem of literature. He believed that even writers like Shimazaki Tōson, who had the best of intentions when he wrote on issues of racism, could only, in the end, reflect the same racist attitudes that they wanted to write against. The irony is that, even though Nakagami believed this, he had to write within that same literature.

*Misaki*, “Garyūsan,” and “Wara no ie” display this same ambivalence: their characters attempt to dominate over space by activating ancient rituals only to have space
dominate over them in turn; and they attempt to destroy space, but, conversely, only participate in its reconfiguration. Also, places, sites key to these protagonists’ respective childhoods, form nodes in their own personal narratives. They attempt to overturn them by tracing origins, only to find that protean narrative crouched and ready, as though it had been waiting there for them. Additionally, by the end of “Wara no ie,” the roji is on the cusp of its own demolition and, subsequently, its own re-figuration into a capitalistic space no less discriminatory than the space before.

The destruction of the roji will bring about a two-fold event, on the one hand destroying this instance of the roji as a system of discrimination, but also, on the other hand, eradicating difference itself and, more importantly, the history of that difference.

Starting in 1977 the local government of Shingū implemented social integration measures (dōwa taisaku), and began to dismantle the Kasuga district buraku, Nakagami’s source of inspiration for the roji; by 1980 the entire buraku had been replaced by about fifty iron-concrete houses. In 1978, Nakagami’s most acclaimed novel, Karekinada, was published, along with stories like “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie.” His collection Kumano-shū, published serially during this time, chronicled the destruction of the buraku through a more personal, shishōsetsu perspective. Nakagami briefly halted the publication of these short stories to write Sennen no yuraku (A Thousand Years of Pleasure, 1982), which Watanabe Naomi argues contains, out of Nakagami’s roji narratives, the most developed form of the roji. This was the most productive point in his career as a writer, and critics like Takazawa observe, in retrospect, that “the re-development wave that flooded into the Kishū hisabetsu buraku fueled Nakagami’s creative passions and, at the same time, forever robbed him of an irreplaceable pleasure.” The pleasure for Nakagami perhaps
existed in the nostalgia of his youth: he lived in the buraku—in his roji—until he was seven years old, when his mother married and moved to a different district in Shingū; and it most certainly existed in his appreciation of the history of the buraku people and the history of difference the buraku itself represented. When the government undertook measures to integrate society, however, it simultaneously erased that history, the history of a repressed society.

Nakagami has to destroy the roji because the reality around him destroyed it; history, as he lived it, poured over into fiction and forced him to eradicate it. Capitalism, manifest in the construction boom of the late 1970s and early 80s, compelled this change from one system to another, and Nakagami parallels it, reconfiguring one discriminatory space into another, one that resembles what Henri Lefebvre terms “abstract space.” For Lefebvre, history can be viewed in terms of different instances of space, and he labels one of these periods abstract space. He describes it as such: “Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those which derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (sex, age, ethnicity).”

Lefebvre continues:

The reproduction of the social relations of production within this [abstract] space inevitably obeys two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other. Thus, despite—or rather because of—its negativity, abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ‘differential space’, because, inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences.

In Lefebvre’s theoretical outline there is room for the hope that abstract space will not be the last instance of space to develop; differential space, contained within it, lies waiting for its moment. Perhaps Nakagami, too, perceived something similar in the space of Kumano—a space always and already there in Japanese history. This would explain his
persistent use of it in the setting of his narratives. However, at least in the stories examined here, he did not seem capable of allowing it to well up out of abstract space. If anything, circumstances seem quite the opposite: that is to say, any potential space of difference is erased by the modern narrative of capitalism, abstract space.

The effort to effect the identification of a society of defeat (i.e., the burakumin) with mainstream society resembles one of the operations Nakagami perceives in narrative. Anyone who, in Nakagami’s mind, relied on narrative or had a dependent relationship with it, he calls a “pig.” He calls Tanizaki Jun’ichirō such a “pig of narrative” (monogatari no buta) countless times, apparently never tiring of the expression. Karatani Kōjin agrees with this assessment, even though he does not use such harsh terminology: “Tanizaki’s novels fundamentally reproduce the configuration of monogatari, even if the setting is modernized.” But, like Margherita Long, we can say that Nakagami, too, was a pig of narrative in that he also had to rely on it for his own fiction. He may have been more aware of his actions, consciously trying to manipulate monogatari in certain ways, aiming in the end to invert it, but in the end stories like “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie” still “constitute a series of repetitive rituals” just as Tanizaki’s did, and the instantiation of space he must utilize is the same (narrative) one he opposes.

Many Japanese critics, plumbing the rich Akiyuki texts, describe Nakagami as a writer who struggled to overcome tradition, its modern and pre-modern forms. Misaki clearly features an Oedipal struggle, the single most identifiable narrative of modernity according to some, and in Chi no hate shijō no toki that narrative reaches its conclusion, not with Akiyuki’s murder of his father, but with the father’s suicide: modernity, in other words, collapses in upon itself.
Yomota Inuhiko also argues that each installment of the Aki yuki trilogy overturns the previous narrative loop: *Karekinada* inverts *Misaki* and *Chi no hate shijō no toki* in turn upsets *Karekinada*, “not by the destruction of the loop, but by tracing the loop out again, anticipating the narrative while it is still unformed, and manipulating it, ultimately to its own destruction.” For Yomota, this is an idiosyncrasy of the novel (*shōsetsu*), not only distinctly different from the *shishōsetsu* and the *monogatari*, but pitted distinctly against them.

Additionally, the *setsuwa* texts, as Western critics have shown, demonstrate the same battle between Nakagami and tradition, both in its modern and pre-modern forms. Nina Cornyetz writes how the mythical landscape of Kumano overturns the modern conception of landscape and also reconfigures its pre-modern form. “Nakagami’s [*setsuwa*] narratives,” Cornyetz writes, “stand in defiance of the modern, separated, realistic landscapes” and yet they do not “result in a replication of the landscapes of the Japanese canon.” Livia Monnet conveys a similar opinion in discussing Nakagami’s itinerant Buddhist preacher (*hijiri*), a brutally violent character that challenges and undoes traditional representations of the *hijiri* in various pre-modern texts.

In “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” however, one cannot come to the same conclusions so easily, perhaps because, as Moriyasu Toshiji claims, one should not read Nakagami’s texts hermetically but, rather, read them in conjunction with other, related texts. Alan Tansman’s words perhaps best speak to the conclusions a reader might draw when reading short stories such as “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie” in isolation:

In modernity one is always too late, yet one must nevertheless act as if one were not. One longs for an identity of one’s own making knowing that identity will leave one lonely nonetheless. One starts anew through a tradition one must
Nakagami comes directly out of the Japanese literary tradition he wanted to overcome—he writes both monogatari-like and shishōsetsu-like works. He may have viewed tradition as a mire writers like Tanizaki rolled about in, but he, too, was deeply enmeshed in it; and though he might have wanted to destroy it in order to create a separate place for himself, in the end he had to use it in order to locate himself. Like Garyū Mountain for Toshihisa, tradition has been there ever since his birth as a writer, each time he looked up into the distance, he could see it, and he could not have let it out of his sight without also losing sight of himself. Nakagami’s gift as a writer is to break that history, that tradition down, reveal all its varied parts and pieces, and then reconstruct it, but from a perspective we, as readers, have not accustomed ourselves to and that he, as a writer, wanted, and perhaps had the responsibility, to share.
Notes

All translations, except for those quotations from *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, are my own, unless otherwise noted.

**Chapter 1 – Introduction**


2 Ibid., 157.

3 Zimmerman, afterword to *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, by Nakagami Kenji (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 181.


Karatani’s comment might be obscure by itself, without the context of the rest of his essay. Up until this point he has been contrasting the writings of the Bible with the writings of Homer. He describes the Bible as lacking a visual realism, stating it is fragmentary, and portrays the lives of the ordinary citizen or the lower class. Further, these citizens are forced to bear tragedy owing to external circumstances. Karatani sees Nakagami’s work in line with this.

6 Ishikawa, ed., *Akutagawa-shō zenshū*, Vol. 10 (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1983), 438. This emphasis by Niwa Fumio on the fictional aspect of Nakagami’s work is echoed in other
critics as well. Watanabe Naomi appears to touch on the reason fictionality was such a valued aspect of writers in his book Nakagami Kenji-ron: itoshisa ni tsuite: “If one supposes that the word ‘fiction’ (shōsetsu) is a moniker for what will always problematize ‘narratives’ (monogatari), then Nakagami, although he had been exposed to the temptation of ‘narratives’ more strongly than anyone else (or perhaps exactly because of that), was obviously every inch one of those scant number of writers who continued to be a fiction writer (shōsetsu-ka).” See Watanabe, Nakagami Kenji-ron: itoshisa ni tsuite (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1996), 11.

In Japan of the 1970s there was a general movement to explore the marginalized aspects of Japanese history, perhaps subsumed in a larger trend that sought to work against Japanese tradition. The choice of Niwa Fumio’s words is key in illustrating this trend: he uses the word shōsetsu, a term coined by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935) to translate the English “novel” and to refer to a modern Western conception of writing. By saying that Nakagami has “returned” the shōsetsu to Japanese letters, Niwa is also saying that Nakagami writes against the grain. This contra-tradition movement sought to break up the myths of homogenous and unified (traditional) Japan and no doubt helped to foster an atmosphere friendly to those writers who took up social issues. Niwa himself was such a writer.

7 Cornyetz, 211.

8 Rankin’s collection Snakelust (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1999) is actually no longer in print, so for all intents and purposes Zimmerman’s The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999) is the only translation of Nakagami’s work readily available in English. There is also a translation of “Fushi” (The

9 Cornyetz, 207.

10 Karatani, *Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji*, 239-242. Attending a conference in Washington D.C., Karatani joined a seminar on Nakagami and notes that each person on the discussion panel was a woman and “would, further, identify herself as a feminist (*feminisuto o nanoru*).” He goes on to express interest in their project, which he sees as similar to the project of Japanese critics, only along gender lines.

11 Cornyetz, 208.

12 This is a two-part article appearing in the March and April 1996 issues of *Japan Forum*: part one can be found in *Japan Forum* 8, no. 1 (March 1996): 12-34; part two can be found in *Japan Forum* 8, no. 2 (April 1996): 221-239.


For the chapter in Ōe and Beyond, see "In the Trap of Words: Nakagami Kenji and the Making of Degenerate Fictions," in Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan, eds. Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 130-152.

Zimmerman, "In the Trap of Words," 142.


Dodd, 11.

Cornyetz, 209. The italics are Cornyetz’s.

Ibid., 209.

Cornyetz points out that this association—the monogatari with the female voice—is a false one. See, 215-217.

There are other stories that feature the roji setting written before Misaki, such as Kataku (House on Fire, 1975), but critics, in considering the roji, consistently begin with Misaki.

Takazawa, “Nakagami Kenji-ron: Garyūsan no kaitai,” Subaru 18, no. 5 (May 1996): 153. These two short stories also feature the introduction of many characters that later become important to Nakagami’s roji narratives. They also include cameo appearances of many characters that have already established within Nakagami’s fiction, Akiyuki’s sister, Mie, her husband, Uncle Gen, and Akiyuki’s father, Hamamura Ryūzō. Takazawa
has written that, because of the proliferation of so many characters central to the roji narratives, "‘Garyūsan’ is a thrilling text filled with riddles that can only be solved by [exploring] its relationship with other texts” See Takazawa, “Nakagami Kenji-ron: Garyūsan kaitai,” 160. I believe this statement can also be extended to include “Wara no ie.”

27 The name Komoriku (written 隠国, literally “Hidden Country” or “Hidden Land”) also connects to Nakagami’s description of Kishū, the peninsula where Shingū is located, as a “nation of darkness” (yami no kokka) and as a land “forever in darkness” (taezu yami no naka ni aru). For this last quote, see Nakagami, Nakagami Kenji zenshū (NKZ), Vol. 15 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1996), 119. The reading “Komoriku” is given in Akashi, Nakagami Kenji-ron: genshi no chi ga haramu mono (Osaka: Henshū Kōbō Noa, 1988), 8; in Zhang, Toposu no juryoku トポスの呪力 (Tokyo: Senshū Daigaku Shuppan, 2002), 22; and in Takazawa, Nakagami Kenji jiten: ronkō to shuzai nichiroku (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2002), 21 just to name a few.

28 Zimmerman, “In the Trap of Words,” 133-134.
Chapter 2 – Down the Ever-Winding Narrative Path

1 “Monogatari no keifu” was originally intended to focus on eight writers, but the series, which started with the February 1979 issue, was pulled after the June 1985 issue of Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū, with the feature on the fifth writer, Enchi Fumiko, incomplete.

2 Heibonsha dai hyakkajiten, s.vv. “Monogatari bungaku.”

3 Ibid.

4 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 141.


6 Ibid., 95.

7 Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 112.

8 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 141

9 Dowling, 97.

10 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 121. Nakagami rather melodramatically likens this mark to the identification number tattooed onto the arms of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

11 Ibid., 121.

12 Both Nakagami and Karatani cite evidence that this conspiracy to assassinate the emperor was actually a frame-up; the government only wanted to rid itself of the threat such organized socialists presented. See Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 122-123, and Karatani,
"Nakagami Kenji no sekai-sei," in Karekinada / Haō no nanoka, Vol. 1, Nakagami Kenji senshū (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 383. The 1910 High Treason Incident (taigyaku jiken) is also known as the Kōtoku Incident (Kōtoku jiken), named after one of the principal conspirators in the case, Kōtoku Shūsui (real name Kōtoku Denjirō, 1871-1911). The incident began with the arrests of two people discovered in the possession of explosives and from there grew into an investigation that spread throughout Japan. Hundreds of people were arrested and, of them, twenty-six of them were charged with conspiring to assassinate the emperor. Twenty-four of them received the death penalty, though twelve of them soon had their death sentences commuted to life imprisonment (muki chōeki). Six of those sentenced to death were from Shingo, among them Ōishi Seinosuke. All of those charged in the incident were socialists and many people suspected the government, quickly becoming more and more rightwing, was only using the discovery of explosives as an excuse to remove what it viewed as a threat. Its efforts were more than successful: the socialist movement soon entered into what is now known as “the winter years” (fuyu no jidai). Investigations in the 1960s revealed that many of those sentenced were falsely accused and confirmed suspicions that the High Treason Incident was only a frame-up (detchiage). Interestingly enough, however, in 1967, a special appeal (tokubetsu kōkoku) to reopen the case was defeated by the Supreme Court. See Heibonsha dai hyakkajiten, s.vv. “Taigyaku jiken.”

13 Ōishi was known as “the doctor” (dokuturo) in Shingū. From 1891 to 1895 he studied medicine at the University of Oregon and when he returned to Shingū he put up a sign announcing himself as “Dokutoru Ōishi” and began to treat the poor, even when they
could not afford to pay him. In “Garyūsan” and “Wara no ie,” the character Sakura (who is also mentioned in passing in the short story “Kataku,” and more fully in the Akiyuki trilogy’s *Karekinada* and *Chi no hate shijō no toki*) has an uncle who was also known as “the doctor.” In the context of the Akiyuki saga, he works for the good of the people of the roji, but when he is arrested on suspicion of participating in the High Treason Incident, the people of the roji turn a blind eye. This earns them, forever, the spite of Sakura who not only wants to get back the land he views as rightfully his, but hurt the people in the roji at the same time. Critics such as Takazawa Shūji have discussed Doctor Ōishi as a basis for this character. See Takazawa, “Nakagami Kenji-ron: Garyūsan kaitai,” 152-162. Also, Satō actually knew Ōishi. The two exchanged words concerning whether or not socialism could promote good literature. See Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 632.

14 The word *tenkō* comes to the reader thick with meaning from the recent past. In the 1930s and early 40s, the fascist Japanese government sought out many communist writers and intellectuals, whose ideas were in opposition or posed a threat to the leadership, and forced them to recant their own ideology in favor of the one espoused by the government. One well-known proletarian writer, Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933), died while in police custody and so those targeted after him understandably complied out of their own self-interests, even though they did not necessarily abandon their beliefs. Nevertheless, after the war ended people tended to view them with far less sympathy, wholly critical of them for their weakness and capitulation. Ōsugi Shigeo says Nakagami’s use of *tenkō* is a
harsh criticism of Satô (kibishiku kimetsukeru), but what Nakagami has really done is to take tenkō and deflect its more common meaning in favor of his own. Nakagami himself insists that he does not use tenkō with its standard implication, but he actually has, only he has inverted it from a term that once described a movement from the margin towards the center to a term that now describes movement in the opposite direction, towards the margin. See Ōsugi, “Ō, monogatari, nanji yameri!,” in NKZ, Vol. 15 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1996), 6. The title of Ōsugi’s article is taken from a line that appears in a novel by Satô Haruo entitled Den’en no yūtsu (Rural Melancholy, 1918), which was first published, incompletely, as Yameru sōbi (The Sick Rose, 1917). Near the end of Den’en no yūtsu, the protagonist discovers the roses in his garden are worm-eaten and cries out, “O rose, thou art sick!” (Ō sōbi, nanji yameri!) This line, in turn, is derived from William Blake’s (1757-1827) poem “The Sick Rose.” See Keene, 638-639.

15 Nakagami Kenji, NKZ, Vol. 15, 122. Nakagami here refers to Shimazaki Tōson’s Hakai (The Broken Commandment, 1906) and the predicament of its central character Ushimatsu, a member of the eta, which was an earlier epithet for those known today as burakumin. Ushimatsu’s father, in order to give his son a chance at a better life, moves to a mountain pasture where he can maintain the secret of his lineage. On his deathbed, the father commands Ushimatsu not to forget all the sacrifices that he has made and the obligation Ushimatsu has to keep his origins secret. Ushimatsu, however, increasingly feels the need to confess, and in the novel’s climactic moments does so, even though he fears what society will do in reaction. This is what Nakagami refers to when he says that Satô is in the same situation as Ushimatsu: by revealing his own origins, Satô risks
bringing himself to the attention of the government, undoubtedly keeping a concerned eye on a place like Shingu after having discovered there six people conspiring to assassinate the emperor.

16 Ibid., 120.

17 Ibid., 130. Nakagami refers to the narratives that Kishū embodies as “invisible narratives” (fukashi no monogatari) so, rather than say the normative forces seek to suppress them, it is perhaps better to say they seek to restrict the invisible narratives to the shadows.

18 Mikhail Bakhtin’s main body of work was produced in the 1930s, but went unpublished until the 1960s due to the political turmoil of the intervening times. It was not until the mid-1970s that he became known to English scholarship, and the process of translating his work began. Bakhtin was introduced to Japan at roughly the same time and his work influenced a number of writers and intellectuals aside from Nakagami, including the Nobel Prize-winning writer Ōe Kenzaburō (1935-) and the social anthropologist Yamaguchi Masao (1931-).


20 He uses the word to broadly cover all of the languages people of various social classes, generations, or locales speak within the actual language, even including, for instance, the slang that at one moment seems to be on everyone’s lips and the next, fades away.

21 Utterance also has a particular meaning for Bakhtin. Michael Holquist, in his Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World (London: Routledge, 1990), describes it as a speech
act, an act of communication that meets the need of the individual speaker to express a specific meaning and meets the needs of the requirements language has as a system. See 59-63.

22 Holquist, 69.

23 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 140. Nakagami adamantly believes Tanizaki relied heavily on narrative (the law and system), from the beginning of his career to the end, and he sees evidence of it throughout all of Tanizaki’s themes. “My conclusion, if I were to give it now,” Nakagami says, “is that Tanizaki Jun’ichirō is a writer of the law and system. His female worship (josei suhai), his eroticism, his Satanism (akuma shugi), his move to the Kansai area, his imitation of the Kansai dialect—all of it conforms to this law and system, comes from him giving himself up to this law and system. That is to say, the masochism (higyaku-sei) and material worship (yuibutsu suhai) that Tanizaki impudently believed to be eroticism was masochism directed at this law and system, material worship of it.” See ibid., 143. To use language that Nakagami might have, Tanizaki was like a pig feeding at the trough of narrative. Nakagami’s arguments do not always make that point well in the essay, but he nonetheless firmly believes Tanizaki threw himself at the feet of narrative as though it were a sadistic woman in one of his texts. For instance, Nakagami calls attention to Tanizaki’s essay In ’ei raisan (In Praise of Shadows, 1933-1934) and says that, although it appears to be a treatise on traditional Japanese beauty, it actually “realizes the law and system, which supports that beauty.” See ibid., p.153.

24 Ibid., 121.
Zimmerman, “Nakagami Kenji,” 254. Zimmerman also implies that Nakagami’s dislike of Tanizaki had to do with his never receiving the Tanizaki Award, but there are also comments made that could lead one to believe he was envious of Tanizaki’s literary talent.

26 Nakagami Kenji, NKZ, Vol. 15, 121. Though this is the essay on Satō, Nakagami frequently brings Tanizaki into the picture. Also, one would think that by referring to Tanizaki as “Jun’ichirō,” implying some degree of intimacy, he is also scorning him—his prose certainly has that tone—but Nakagami also frequently refers to Satō Haruo as “Haruo” and Ueda Akinari as “Akinari,” perhaps because he does admire their work. Interestingly enough, he tends to refer to Orikuchi Shinobu by his family name, and when he mentions Enchi Fumiko he uses her entire name. Finally, it is worth speculating on why Nakagami might be so critical of Tanizaki’s move to the Kansai area and his use of the Kansai dialect in some of his stories, and take both as evidence that he enjoyed the law and system. The Kansai area, particularly Kyoto of which Tanizaki was fond, is the traditional capital of Japan and the center that Nakagami so despised. Tanizaki, by embracing it, has earned Nakagami’s harsh criticism.

27 Scholars assume Taketori monogatari to have been written in the early Heian Period (794-1185), sometime between 850 and 950, and Ise monogatari sometime in the mid-tenth century.

28 Nakagami distinguishes between the two monogatari with two different sets of orthography. The post-Genji monogatari is written in kanji (物語) and the other, pre-Genji monogatari in katakana (モノガタリ). Since finding some way to represent such a
distinction in English would be awkward and confusing (it is confusing enough in Japanese), I have elected to refer to them simply as post-\textit{Genji} and pre-\textit{Genji}, respectively.


31 Nakagami, \textit{NKZ}, Vol. 15, 143. Also, the tale (\textit{monogatari}) in reference to \textit{Utsuho} here is written in katakana while the tale used with \textit{Genji} is written in kanji. It should also be noted that the “ghostly \textit{koto}” that Nakagami mentions here refers to the \textit{koto} that \textit{Utsuho monogatari}’s Toshikage acquires when in Persia and later bequeaths to his daughter. His daughter later has an illegitimate son, Nakatada, with a young noble. This young noble abandons the two, and when Nakatada is five years old his mother takes him to a hollow tree (\textit{utsuho}), where she raises him with the assistance of monkeys and bears, and teaches him the \textit{koto}. After some time passes, the two are discovered by the same young noble, now Major Captain of the Right (\textit{Udaishō}), and brought back to the capital. Nakatada’s musical talents and good looks bring him to the attention of the Emperor, who eventually gives Nakatada his daughter, the first princess, in marriage. In the end, a non-entity in terms of the Japanese court is able to gain a powerful position in the regency system and, thus, undermine it.
32 Taketori monogatari, which Nakagami similarly holds in high regard, is another example of mythical origins: the bamboo cutter discovers Kaguya-hime, the heroine, in a stalk of bamboo.

33 Nakagami himself was also an illegitimate child and so his affection for Utsuho probably has more than a little to do with his ability to relate to the illegitimate Nakatada.

34 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 143. One can call this stance into question. The Akashi Lady, for instance, is the daughter of a provincial governor who in typical Heian society would be highly unlikely to be involved with someone of Genji’s stature, and yet she bears him a daughter who later becomes empress, thus placing her in a position of power.

Nakagami’s real qualm with Genji appears to be the important place it occupies in the Japanese literary tradition, and the fact that, because critics offer it up as a shining example of Japanese literature, other monogatari such as Utsuho, get pushed to the side.

35 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 15, 155.

36 Ibid., 154.

37 Holquist, 33.

38 Ibid., 33.


Chapter 3 – The Ambivalence of Nakagami’s Space

1 Boyarin, “Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory,” in *Remapping Memory*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 7-8. It should be noted that only Western culture is known to have considered space stagnant; as Henri Lefebvre has pointed out, there have not been enough studies on Eastern notions of space to formulate a theory on it.


3 Yomota, *Kishu to tensei: Nakagami Kenji* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2001), 186. This raises an interesting problem in dealing with Nakagami’s texts. Because certain stories often cover the same ground of the preceding stories, almost as though they were a re-writing, and the same characters necessarily appear in various texts and even in the same *time* of other texts, should one read all inter-related stories as one text? Or should they be fenced off from one another? In this paper I try to treat them separately as much as possible, but acknowledge intratextual (and intertextual) details as they appear.


5 Akashi, 8.

6 As the roji progresses through Nakagami’s works it gains more depth, and it also, ironically, moves towards its own destruction. Tansman writes: “In Nakagami’s early novels the alley is a stable place; later, it becomes dispersed and disappears.” See Tansman, 276.
The titles of these respective stories are very interesting. "Garyūsan," written 臥龍山 (perhaps best translated as "Crouching Dragon Mountain") does not appear in 

Kokugo daijiten, but garyū (also read garyō) does (See Kokugo daijiten, s.v. "Garyū"). The term can refer, perhaps obviously, to a crouching dragon or the shape of a crouching dragon, or to a person unknown to the world who has an exceptional ability; a great person who is hidden from public view; a distinguished person out of power and perhaps in opposition to the current political regime (zaiya no ketsubutsu). This second meaning comes from the legend of Zhuge Liang (181-234 AD), also known by his courtesy name (the name given upon reaching adulthood), Kong Ming. In Japanese he is known as Shokatsu Ryō (諸葛亮) or Shokatsu Kōmei (諸葛孔明), where Ryō is his given name and Kōmei the rendering of his courtesy name. He is a historical figure who appears in the Chinese work 

The History of the Three Kingdoms (in Japanese Sangoku shi; in Chinese Sanguo zhi), which was compiled during the Jin Dynasty (256-420) by Chen Shou (233-297). During the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280) Zhuge Liang was known as a great statesman, engineer, and military strategist. He served the Shu Kingdom as chief military adviser and later as prime minister, attempting up to his death to reunite the Han Empire. Garyū ("Crouching Dragon" or "Sleeping Dragon") was a nickname he had acquired as his reputation spread. Garyūsan, it should also be noted, is an actual mountain in the Shingū area that was demolished as part of an urban revitalization program in the late 1970s, and, judging from Nakagami's description of it in the story, its shape resembles a sleeping or crouching dragon, according itself with the first definition; however, the
second definition, referring to a person who is hidden from public view, out of power, and perhaps in opposition to the current regime, also applies to the text, particularly the character of Morido who is consistently associated with the mountain. Morido is only peripherally present in the text, appearing on scant occasions, but his presence is invoked a number of times, especially by the protagonist Toshihisa. Morido, a hermit, lives sealed up in his house and out of society’s view, yet Toshihisa describes him as having a mythical or uncanny power. He plays the role of scapegoat, all of Komoriku’s sins seem heaped down upon him, and Sakura and Kuwahara, the two most powerful men in the town who plot to tear down the mountain and build a supermarket in its place, wait for him to die in order to start the demolition project.

“Wara no ie” (House of Straw) most likely refers to the legend of Semimaru. According to the nō play, written by the famous playwright Zeami (1363-1443), Semimaru is the fourth child of a fictionalized Emperor Daigo (r. 897-930). Born blind, his father has Semimaru’s head shaved so that people will believe him to be a monk, and then has him exiled from the capital to a place near the Ōsaka Barrier. There, he plays the biwa (lute) as a blind minstrel and lives in a straw hut. He has a sister named Sakagami who was similarly abandoned by the emperor because of her mental derangement. When Sakagami hears Semimaru playing the biwa she is drawn to him, but at the end of the play they part again. See Tyler, Japanese Nō Dramas (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 236-239 for commentary on the play, and 239-250 for a translation of the play. These aspects of the Semimaru legend will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5; however, it should be noted that there is only one direct reference to a straw house in the story “Wara

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no ie.” When the protagonist of the story, Takeshi, is talking with a childhood friend, Mitsuo, he says: “I remember a lot about you, man. You lived in a place that was like a house made of straw. That was you, right? With your eyes big [from malnutrition]?” See Nakagami, NKZ, Vol.2, 453. The reference to Semimaru is perhaps meant more to evoke its atmosphere in “Wara no ie.” Semimaru, as legend has it, was abandoned by his father, and the straw home he makes his naturally strikes one as an image of extreme fragility and vulnerability. Takeshi’s life, both his childhood and his present home life, reflect that. As a child his home was predominantly empty, both his parents frequently absent, and as a young adult, he has found his affection for his wife fading, his desires leading him to an affair with a woman who lives in the roji. In other words, he begins to repeat the mistake of his parents, leaving his own home without his presence: his children are vulnerable to the same feelings of abandonment he was forced to experience as a child.

8 Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift, introduction to Thinking Space (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.


11 Ibid., 3.

12 Ibid., 8.

13 Crang and Thrift, 1.

14 Ibid., 2.
For Malpas, subjective space and objective space are two distinct concepts, but ones that are intricately related to each other. Subjective space is based on the subject's experiences, how he perceives the space around him based on his own perspective. Objective space is not a space inclusive of all perspectives, but one completely devoid of experience. Malpas states that it is a conceived space and, in that way, he removes the possibility of the experiential.

Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 203. Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Doreen Massey, and Elizabeth Grosz, just to name a few, all express similar sentiments. Graham Nerlich also writes that "space is a real, concrete thing which, though intimately linked to material objects by containing them all, is not dependent on them for its existence. It involves itself in our lives in a concrete and practical way when we try to probe and measure the world and understand how it works." See Nerlich, 2. Although Nerlich states that space is not dependent on objects within it (a conception of space that falls back on space as a container), he does describe, in the last sentence, an interaction akin to what Harvey and others have described, between people and space, though Nerlich would insist that they do not create it.


21 In *Misaki*, Nakagami appears to have an aversion to naming. Many of the characters that don’t have names in *Misaki*, such as Akiyuki’s father or his brother-in-law, have names in subsequent stories. The town, unnamed in *Misaki*, is clearly the Komoriku of later stories since many of the same characters reappear.


23 Asada uses the katakana term *porisekushuaru* and Karatani’s term is originally in English. See, respectively, Karatani et al., “Sa’i / sabetsu, soshite monogatari no seisei,” *Subaru* 16, no. 10 (October 1994): 256; and Karatani, *Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji*, 242. Both Asada and Karatani use these terms with respect to sexuality in Nakagami’s literature, but the terms equally apply to the concept of space. Also, Comyetz, in her chapter “An Ambivalent Masculinist Politics” argues for, successfully in my opinion, the *roji* as dual-parent-figure. See Comyetz, 205-225.

24 Quoted in Comyetz, 210.


27 *Heibonsha daihyakka jiten*, s.vv. “Kumano no shinkō.”
28 Ibid.


31 Paul Swanson gives a more detailed explanation of the Shugendō ascetic: “These ascetics were generally known as *shugyōsha*, *keza*, or *shugenja*, that is, those who accumulate power or experience through severe ascetic practices such as fasting, seclusion, meditations, spells, sutra recitation, magical exercises, sitting under waterfalls, etc. Such people were not necessarily Buddhist monks, but included hermits, diviners, exorcists, and wandering religious figures.” See Swanson, 3.

32 Miyake, 123.

33 Ibid., 123.

34 Each area had its own main temple, the first two established in the early Heian Period (794-1185): Hongū Shrine, located in Hongū, and Hayatama Shrine, located in Shingū; and the third, the Nachi Shrine, followed in the eleventh century. The three temples also have three main deities enshrined: in the Hongū shrine, there is the Ketsumiko deity; in the Shingū Hayatama there is the Kumano Hayatama deity; and the Fusumi deity resides...
in Nachi Shrine. Each of these deities also has a Buddhist equivalent: Amida Nyorai, Yakushi Nyorai, and Senju Kannon, respectively.

A version of the pilgrimage is still practiced today. There were some rather grim practices performed in these early times as well. For instance, Buddhist practitioners believed the sea near the shores of the Nachi Shrine led to the Pure Land, and priests were often packed into boats with sealed cabins to sail across the divide, a practice known as *fudaraku tokai*. See Moerman, “The Ideology of Landscape and the Theater of State: Insei Pilgrimage to Kumano (1090-1220),” *Journal of Japanese Religious Studies* 24, no. 3-4 (1997): 356, and also *Heibonsha daihyakka jiten*, s.vv. “Kumano no shinkō.”


Ibid., 260-266.

Many women also made the pilgrimage to alleviate defilement (*shokue o kanwa suru*), including the famous poet Izumi Shikibu from the mid-Heian Period. See *Kodai chimei daijiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1999), s.v. “Kumano.”

Moerman speculates as to why the pilgrimage was so popular with retired emperors: he sees it as a journey “of individual salvation that looks to the future and, on the other, for an institutional regeneration that looks back to an idealized past.” See Moerman, 357.

Miyake, 125.

Moerman, 358.

Karatani, “Nakagami Kenji no sekai-sei,” in *Karekinada Haō no nanoka* (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1998), 382. Other stories that mention the High Treason Incident are those
in the collection *Kumano-shū* (The Kumano Collection, 1984). *Kumano-shū* was originally serialized in the magazine *Gunzo* from 1980-1982, but the stories were compiled and published under the title *Kumano-shū* in 1984 by Kodansha.

43 Ibid., 382. In saying that the buraku is “located everywhere” (*doko ni mo aru*), Karatani means to say that it, as a marginalized space, exists in all societies; it is not unique to Japan.


45 Nakagami himself might argue that the Kumano region (present day Wakayama prefecture) continued to be seen in a similar light into modern times, considering events like the High Treason Incident.

46 Mōrōtai painting was a style attempted in the Meiji Period (1868-1912). The principal artists involved in the movement were Yokoyama Taikan (1868-1958), Hishida Shunsō (1874-1911), and Shimomura Kanzan (1873-1930). These three were the core of a group of artists led by Okakura Tenshin (also known as Okakura Kakuzō, 1868-1913), who established the Japan Art Institute (*Nihon Bijutsu-in*) in 1898. The group’s goal was to revolutionize traditional Japanese-style painting, but the movement proved unpopular with the public, who accused it of mimicking Western-style painting, and quickly went into decline. The style features indistinct lines (*motsusen byōhō*), rather than the conventional bold ones (hence the name *mōrō* or “muddled”), and the use of oil paint as medium. See Ishida et al., eds., *Nihon bijutsushi jiten* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987), 722.

47 Cornyetz, 169.
Furuhashi, 75. Furuhashi actually uses the term *shōshimin* (petit-bourgeois) to describe what I have called “mainstream” society.

Nakagami was, in a sense, an outsider to the *buraku*: when he was young, his mother remarried and moved away from the *buraku*. If he had really grown up within it, he probably would not have learned to read or write, due to the poor education available to those from the *buraku* during that time period. Perhaps because of this, many of Nakagami’s protagonists feel a sense of alienation from the *roji*.


Yomota Inuhiko elaborates on this issue:

As we know, from a certain point [in Nakagami’s career], he began to consciously use stereotypes, to actively use clichés ... Why is that? Normally, when one is dealing with problems of discrimination, it’s conventional wisdom [to believe] that that sort of generalized thinking is wrong, [to believe] that one must write a narrative that expresses reality more realistically. When this conventional wisdom continued to persist, Nakagami consciously went and created stories filled with clichés. At that point, he took upon himself an extremely large number of these narratives that preceded him ... By doing that, he decided to try and transcend the stereotypes directed at the problem of discrimination. I believe that, by driving that suffocating style, which Nakagami repeats [over and over again], into the ground, he attempted to overcome society’s conventional wisdom regarding discrimination, making it into a problem of literature, of style.


Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, 98.
53 Ibid., 27-28.


55 As noted in the previous chapter, Nakagami sees narrative as originating in the emperor system. Part of his project as a writer involves re-articulating the imperial authority, recasting it in another form. Tomotsune Tsutomu terms this a “project of de-narrativization” yet points out that, in “reestablishing narrative [Nakagami] did not aim to eliminate the emperor but to rearticulate the imperial system. He never abandoned his admiration for the emperor although he recognized that it is the emperor system that implicitly provides the hierarchical order and the key for viewing the buraku as defiled.”

See Tomotsune, “Nakagami Kenji and the Buraku Issue in Postwar Japan,” Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 4, no. 2 (2003): 221-222. This is an important aspect of Nakagami’s writing to keep in mind as it is a trend that marks many of his works, not only with respect to the emperor system, but in his stance towards the general narrative system as well. Nakagami consistently undertakes acts of ambivalence in his writing: he will deconstruct an instantiation of narrative, the emperor system here, for instance, but he will follow it with a reconstruction, a recasting of, ultimately, another narrative.

Responsibility then lies necessarily in the reader to question the new instantiation and judge whether Nakagami has done nothing but propagate the first narrative or whether he has diverted it onto a new path. If the latter, there the reader must additionally ask whether this diversion is any better than the preceding one or if it will only take us forward to where we came from.

Nakagami repeats this phrase so often that one expects to see it at least once or twice in every story. Alan Tansman writes on the repetition of this line: “Here meaning yields to rhythm and form. So often are such phrases repeated that their content becomes emptied out, leaving only the musical rhythms of their surface behind.” See Tansman, 263.


Harvey, 253.

Ibid., 254.

Sakura’s action here—the placing of three 10-yen coins over the remaining parts of the mountain—is highly symbolic. Capital metaphorically erases the mountain and is also necessary to buy up the land rights and to hire the labor that will raze the mountain. In other words, capitalism is the force necessary to demolish this natural space, and ultimately it is capitalism that replaces the space of the roji. The repercussions of this will be dealt with in the following chapters.

A key marker of difference between Sakura and characters like Akiyuki and Toshihisa is not only that he has the means to dominate over space via capital, but also that the narrator describes him in feminine terms, a characteristic that also places him in a negative light, at least from the perspective of the principal characters.

Nakagami, in a rather hyperbolic tone (even for him), writes, “Nature is not the type of thing that people sing or weep over; rather, I believe it is something that can only be termed, again, ‘narrative.’ That is to say, narratives—which turn people into the profane,
into idiots, into pigs that only grow fat on the food fed to them—envelop us in the form of nature’s grasses, its trees, or its hills that shine in the sun. Nature—*that* is the enemy.”


65 Zimmerman, “In the Trap of Words,” 143. Zimmerman also points out an instance of *kunimi* in the novel *Karekinada*. See ibid., 144.


68 Lefebvre, 30.

69 Eve Zimmerman has written something similar with respect to *Karekinada*: “Nakagami suggests that landscape is as powerful a force as consciousness—that Akiyuki and his people are the puppets of forces beyond their control. The very forms of the landscape—a metaphor for the predetermined shape of narrative itself—render the human subject nameless and faceless.” See Zimmerman, “In the Trap of Words,” 143. I would, however, change “landscape” to “space” in this case.

70 Tansman, 276.


72 Ibid., 404.

73 Livia Monnet writes about this inversion of the traditional masculine and feminine roles, stating that such a reversal does not necessarily entail a subversion, as some Japanese critics have argued. See note 7 of Monnet, “Ghostly Women: Part I,” 29.

75 Cornyetz, 216. Another possible influence on the reading of the roji as a feminized space could be what Doreen Massey refers to as the mistaken historical trend of thinking of space as feminine simply because prior conceptions had it that space was an empty container. See Massey, 1-23.

76 Ibid., 215.

77 Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, 89.

78 Watanabe Naomi talks about water as a symbol of femininity in his *Nakagami Kenji-ron*, 95-103. Also, Tomotsune talks about the sea “as the amniotic fluid of a mother’s womb.” See Tomotsune, 222.

79 Rumors, by their very nature, are never something to be believed, but often in Nakagami’s work it is the most reliable form of information one can get his or her hands on. In “Garyūsan” there are rumors stating that Sakura is the brother of Morido or possibly his cousin. It is also rumored that Toshihisa is Morido’s son.


81 Ultimately, Cornyetz argues for a re-reading of the roji, concluding that, “Akiyuki’s roji, as Nakagami tropes it, regardless of the historical actuality, is as much a ‘father-roji’ as it is a ‘mother-roji’ … or more precisely, the roji is a paradigm of the collapsing of identificatory terms including those of gender. In it paternity, maternity, even fraternity, are made nonexistent.” This re-reading, however, is based on the entire Akiyuki trilogy, not *Misaki* alone. See Cornyetz, 215.

82 Takeshi’s story, in fact, offers a poignant example of a painful childhood, particularly when he reflects on the house he used to live in:
The jerry-built houses were needlessly spacious. In the far corner of his house there was a drum used at a young man’s wedding. He turned on the light. On the dining table his mother had left Takeshi, who couldn’t read Korean, a note scribbled falteringingly in katakana: “Grab dinner at the market.” Each time this happened Takeshi shouted, “Shit!” … Even now, whenever there was rare occasion for him to go home, he had gooseflesh, thinking of how, when he was a kid, the chill of the earthen floor bit into his skin.


83 Determinism is an issue that plagues many of Nakagami’s characters. In Misaki, Akiyuki fears that he will become a violent man just like his father; Toshihisa, though he does not know either of his parents, was a delinquent in his youth, whose violent nature was known to everyone in the roji. In his adulthood he has reformed, but he has only done so by erasing his past transgressions from his memory. Anytime someone reminds him of his past or something that he did in his past, he is anxious or perhaps fearful. In the end he reverts back to his violent nature. Takeshi, too, seems on the verge of repeating one of his parents’ mistakes: though he is married and has two children, he is having an affair with another woman, so frequently in fact, that he is often not at home. This is perhaps what has led critics such as Etō Jun to read Nakagami as part of the Shizenshugi (Naturalism) school, which dealt with similar issues of determinism. See Watanabe Naomi, “Akiyuki to roji,” in Nakagami Kenji, Gunzō Nihon no sakka 6 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), 66. I would be hesitant to label Nakagami a Naturalist writer in that, as many critics have pointed out (such as Zhang), his characters seem to be “cursed” by their forebears. The Naturalist school, in contrast, tended to rely on genetics to demonstrate determinism.

84 Karatani, Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji, 156.
In *Chi no hate shijō no toki*, Akiyuki leaves his construction unit and becomes a lumberjack. Also, Akiyuki’s hatred for his estranged biological father, called only “that man” (*ano otoko*) in *Misaki*, manifests itself, in one instance, in the disparity between their respective attitudes towards construction labor. Akiyuki, who finds pleasure (*kokochi yoi*) in construction work, transforms nature while his father, reputed to be a land broker in *Misaki*, only buys it up; nevertheless, the father tries to present himself as a construction worker: “He [that man] was sitting astride a ridiculously huge motorcycle, the kind ridden by seventeen- or eighteen-year-old street toughs. And though he didn’t do any actually construction work, he was wearing the work breeches and the tinted sunglasses.” See Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, 61. Akiyuki is then “true” because he throws his entire being into his work, and the father “false” because he can only pretend to be a worker.

Zhang, 116. Zhang uses this term in discussing *Misaki*, but it is perhaps more applicable to the Akiyuki of *Chi no hate shijō no toki*, where, in the climax, Akiyuki actually sets fire to the remnants of the *roji*.


My translation of the entire passage reads: “While listening to Yasuo and the woman worker’s talk, he [Akiyuki] continued to dig until he reached a stopping point (*kugiri ga tsuku made*). He loved construction work. He thought it was more honorable than other jobs or occupations. You started working with the sun in the morning, and, in the evening, you quit working with the sun. It was simple and filthy work ....” See Nakagami, *NKZ*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1995), 179. Zimmerman’s translation reads:
“Listening to the banter of Yasuo and the woman, Akiyuki dug as deep as he could go. Damn, he liked to work hard with his body like this. It was the purest form of work. You start when the sun rises and quit when the sun sets. It was simple and even dirty ….” See Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 25-26.


90 Ibid., 423.

91 The narration at this point of “Garyūsan” is ambiguous, but I believe that Toshihisa has murdered Hatano in a fit of rage and sets fire to her house in order to cover it up. I will discuss this more in-depth in the following chapter, but in the scene below Toshihisa has asked Hatano for money, which leads to an argument between the two. The argument escalates to a certain point, but it is cut off before the reader can see how it unfolds. The story resumes with Toshihisa waking up. The argument begins with Hatano speaking:

“Even if I said I’d give you a hundred million yen, it’s different from saying I’ll marry you, you know. You—you’ve stolen from people, you’ve threatened people and you might have felt you’d like to cheat or fool a rich woman [like me], but I’ve never been the kind of person to be cheated or deceived. People are just deluded if they think they’ve tricked or cheated me.”

“I don’t care!”

“You—you had a bad upbringing. I bet when you see some rich woman, you’re thinking, ‘I’ll cheat her!’ Or, ‘I’ll sleep with her first then blackmail her!’”

“That’s enough!” Toshihisa said.

***

He woke to the sound of a siren and suddenly realized he had been sleeping with a cord wound around both of his hands. Toshihisa let go of it. Next to him, lying prostrate with the cord wrapped around her neck was Hatano. Toshihisa stood up naked, his skin cold, and, rushed on by the sound of the siren, he searched for his underwear and shirt. (See ibid., 441.)

92 Karatani, Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji, 156.
Watanabe, “Akiyuki to roji,” 70. Watanabe is quoting the critic Yoshimoto Taka’aki.
See Yoshimoto Taka’aki, Tsuitō shiki (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2000).

Furuhashi, 78.

Chapter 4 – The Place of Memory


Utamakura actually first referred to handbooks that contained place names and other wordplays. Some of these handbooks also had explanations on how these terms were used or had examples of their use in poems. Over time, the connotation of utamakura shifted to reference the toponym. See Kamens, Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 28-29.

Kamens, 22.

Ibid., 19.

Malpas, 19.

De Certeau, 13.

Massey, 120.

Specific places exist in specific times according to Massey, but this does not mean that is the only version of place that should be considered. She argues that places, since they exist throughout time-space, are constantly exposed to contestation. See Massey, 157-173.

Malpas, 25.

Ibid., 32. The italics are Malpas’s.
Gossip and rumor, an idiosyncrasy of Nakagami’s work, would seem to obscure origin because of their inherent unreliability, but, as Mark Morris states, it “often shades narration with its oral and meandering style ... Gossip also underwrites the social bonds and divisions between characters and character-narrators across a wide variety of texts.” See Morris, 38. Gossip and rumor run rampant through the roji and also, as a narrative, act to totalize. Yet, at the same time, their orality represents a fundamental characteristic of narrative, part of that originary moment Nakagami seeks to capture. The irony is that he can only capture the spoken voice by writing it.

Morrison uses the concept of rememory throughout her work, but names it explicitly in her novel Beloved (1987). In the scene below, the main character of the novel, Sethe, describes rememory to her daughter, Denver.

Denver begins the conversation:

“What were you talking about?”
“You won’t understand, baby.”
“Yes, I will.”
“I was talking about time. It’s so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I
remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I
don’t think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out
there. Right in the place where it happened.”

“Can other people see it?” asked Denver.

“Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and
you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it’s you
thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory
that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real.
It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm—every tree and grass blade of it
dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there—you who never
was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen
again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. So, Denver, you can’t ever go
there. Never. Because even though it’s all over—over and done with—it’s going
to always be there waiting for you.”

simply a memory that belongs to a person; rather, it is a process that allows memory to
exist outside of the person. Sethe describes it as a picture that floats around in the world,
a picture that anyone can “bump” into. The process of rememory creates a concept of
place that is, as J.E. Malpas argues, at once subjective and objective. For Sethe, the farm
where she was kept as a slave will still exist in the world even if it is destroyed, and her
daughter, Denver, would be overtaken by that same narrative of place should she travel
there. Nakagami’s characters, particularly Toshihisa, have to deal with a similar
conception of place: they find, too, that “it’s going to always be there waiting for” them.

18 Zimmerman, “In the Trap of Words,” 141.

19 Zhang frequently describes Akiyuki as “cursed” (norowareta). See, for instance, the
discussion in Zhang, 113-123.

20 Malpas, 39.

21 Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 17.

22 Though not named in Misaki, starting in Karekinada, the brother is named Ikuo.
23 The brother is a presence throughout Nakagami’s literature, first appearing in his earliest works: “Umi e” (To the Sea, 1967) and “Ichiban hajime no dekigoto” (The Very First Event, 1969). The brother is based on Akiyuki’s own actual half-brother, who also committed suicide when he was twenty-four and Nakagami was twelve.

24 There is obvious irony in the brother killing himself on Girl’s Day (Hina Matsuri), another instance of the gender ambivalence in Nakagami’s works. Zhang also comments on this, saying that the brother’s act of suicide on Girl’s Day sets a curse upon the women of the household: the mother, Mie, and Yoshiko. But interestingly enough, it is Akiyuki who suffers the most from it. See Zhang, 114-123.

25 The father is given the name Hamamura Ryūzō in Karekinada.

26 Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 37.

27 Ibid., 46.

28 Tansman, 262.

29 Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 83. This scene also speaks to the feelings that might have existed between Mie and the older brother. Mie calls out to Akiyuki as though he were her lover (marude koibito o yobu yōni), but she is really calling out to the dead brother. The intimation at incestuous feelings is further developed in Karekinada. See Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 3, 226.

30 Ibid., 86.

31 Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 60.

32 Although his half-sister is named Kumi in Misaki, she is renamed Satoko in Karekinada. Since I am only dealing with Misaki here, I will keep with the name Kumi.
“Yayoi” is an interesting name, one that points to the time period in pre-historic Japan from ca. 300 BC to AD 300. Paul Varley, in *Japanese Culture*, writes on the shift between the preceding Jōmon period (ca. 400 BC – 300 BC) and the Yayoi: “Before World War II, it was generally believed that the Yayoi period was begun by a migration of people from the Asian continent via Korea, and that the new ‘Yayoi people,’ moving first eastward (to the Kantō region of Honshu [sic]) and then northward, gradually displaced the Jōmon people and became the Japanese of historic times. More recently, however, scholars have come to believe that the shift from Jōmon to Yayoi was essentially cultural: that is, the Jōmon people became the Yayoi people under the influences of China.” See Varley, 4-5. In either case, whether the Yayoi people were the Japanese of historic times or were only the result of a cultural shift, referencing the Yayoi, on the verge of history, has a clear originary connotation such that the Yayoi bar also symbolizes an origin for Akiyuki.

There is a third daughter mentioned in *Misaki* as fathered by that man, but she was born to a well-to-do woman who left the city long ago. Later, in *Karekinada*, Nakagami reveals the existence of other children fathered by that man, chiefly Hideo, whom Akiyuki kills in a fight that takes place in the novel’s climax.

Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, 36.

Obscuring the boundaries between the narrative of the father and the brother also allows one to see the commonality between them as narratives of origin, or more aptly, originary narratives. Like Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic, these two narratives are not mutually exclusive, but are rather in constant contact with each other. See Holquist, 41.
It is interesting to note that, though the bar is run by women and is described in conventionally feminine spatial terms (i.e., dark, narrow, closed), Akiyuki ventures there to seek out (ties to) his father. As before with the discussion on space, gender becomes amorphous.

Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto*, 104.

Asada Akira discusses this same passage, using it to argue against how he imagines feminist critics will interpret or are interpreting Nakagami. He believes that feminists focus on gender issues and unfairly criticize Nakagami for his depiction of violence against women or male domination over women. This putative trampling of women (*onna o jūrin suru*) is, in his opinion, more ambivalent than feminists are willing to allow. He states, "Even if we suppose that Akiyuki is subjectively violating his half-sister as a means of challenging his father, one can also see that, objectively, the dexterous prostitute [Kumi] is taking pleasure from sex with the youthful body of a virgin [Akiyuki].” He goes on to say that, in the preponderance of sex scenes in Nakagami’s work, the woman takes the initiative (*shudōken o motte iru*), but I think it is important to point out that, while Kumi does take the initiative in *Misaki*, she might do so because she is a prostitute: her role requires it of her. Also, while she may enjoy sleeping with a young man more so than the older men she alludes to having sex with, she also has no idea Akiyuki is her half-brother. The enjoyment she experiences is not necessarily contingent upon that ignorance, but one would do well to remember that, in spite of the forwardness of her advances, Akiyuki is always in control of the situation. Additionally, some of Asada’s comments here are disturbing: he states that feminists misunderstand the
eroticism (kan 'nōsei) in Nakagami’s texts and he worries “this [misunderstanding] will grow more and more prevalent as Nakagami’s literature begins to be translated in the West” (Nakagami bungaku ga kore kara Ōbei ni yaku sarete iku toki masumasu hirogaru osore ga aru). Feminist perspectives, as Livia Monnet and Nina Cornyetz have argued, bring another, much needed perspective to an otherwise masculine-dominated field. See Karatani et al., “Sa’i / sabetsu, soshite monogatari no seisei,” 255.

40 Watanabe points out that this acceptance is only temporary ending (karisome no owari) and that, now that Akiyuki has chosen to deal with this problem of his lineage, the narrative must repeat itself in some form: that form would be Karekinada. See Watanabe, Nakagami Kenji-ron: itoshisa ni tsuite, 21-22.

41 Nakagami, The Cape and Other Stories from the Japanese Ghetto, 99 and 104, respectively.

42 Ibid., 20.

43 Karatani et al., 256.


45 One instance of this uncertain memory occurs when Toshihisa recalls spending the night on Garyū, the memory that prefaces this chapter. The passage begins:

He could see Garyū Mountain over the roofs of the houses ... He thought it a mountain in possession of a strange power and recalled how, when he was a child, he had run off to the mountain and hidden himself in amongst the leaves of grasses and the overgrown weeds. No, maybe that was the time he had first run away after being adopted by his distant relatives in Hirokado. (See ibid., 432.)

46 Ibid., 420.

47 Ibid., 399.
48 Ibid., 454.

49 Ibid., 396.

50 Ibid., 406. There is another telling passage that connects Morido and the Garyū Mountain: “The mountain was breathing. The squat houses in the alley stretched on and in one of them, Morido, his hand naturally misshapen like a cow’s hoof, lay couched in bed.” See ibid., 410. Nakagami uses yokotawatte iru (lying on one’s side) to describe Morido in bed, but he writes it as 薬っている (which would normally be read fisette iru), clearly tying Morido’s prostrate shape to the crouching mountain.

51 Also, spatially speaking, Morido connects the characters. He lives next to a candy store located on the corner of a T-intersection in the roji, which places him in a (spatial) position that connects three distinct lines: Toshihisa, Sakura, and the land, particularly the mountain.

52 Oryū no Oba is an important character in Nakagami’s works. She is the narrator of Sennen no yuraku (A Thousand Years of Pleasure, 1982) and the narrator of Kiseki (Miracle, 1988), though in the latter novel she has already died and speaks through the medium of a drunken old man. She is based on an old woman to whom Nakagami was introduced in Shingū, who could not read and was thus forced to commit everything to memory since she had no other way of recording it. Her appearance in “Garyūsan” is the first one.


54 There are several ways that Toshihisa could be related to Sakura, depending on their relationship to Morido. If Morido is also Sakura’s father, as is suggested, then Toshihisa
and Sakura are half-brothers; if Morido is Sakura’s brother, another possibility, Sakura is Toshihisa’s uncle; and if Morido is Sakura’s cousin then Toshihisa is Sakura’s cousin once removed. Like the mountain, Morido is central to Toshihisa’s life: all of the possible relationships to others vary according to his relationship to Morido.


56 Iguchi Tokio discusses the scapegoat in Nakagami’s work, noting how the scapegoat bears the impurities of the community and, through its sacrifice, purifies the community. Morido and Uncle Gen play that role in “Garyūsan” and Misaki, respectively. See Iguchi, 34-48.

57 Nakagami, NKZ, 426-427.

58 Sakura mentions that the land was his grandfather’s and his uncle’s. His uncle is referred to as Doctor Ōishi, a clear reference to Ōishi Seinosuke, one of the Kumano group members executed for his role in the High Treason Incident in 1910.

59 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 2, 407. This scene also takes place just after Yoshitarō and Toshihisa have discussed Sei’ichi, a drug addict who lives with Yoshitarō’s mother. Though Sei’ichi is two years older than Toshihisa, he reminds Toshihisa of himself as a child. In one scene, where Sei’ichi is clearly high on some sort of hallucinogen, Toshihisa observes: “Looking at Sei’ichi’s face so filled with fear, Toshihisa felt briefly that he was looking at himself as he was in the past.” See ibid., 437.

60 Ibid., 427. There is one other instance of this mass or growth, again occurring, not while Toshihisa is driving, but while he is in his car: “... Toshihisa realized that some feverish-like thing had nested inside both him and Yoshitarō. It was a fever that [existed]
for no reason. Yoshitarô's mother was originally a prostitute. When he was a kid he got
scabs and pimples because of malnutrition, and people teased him, calling him Stage
Three because they thought he had third stage syphilis—but that wasn't the reason [for
the fever's existence] either. The fever came from the mountain and the alley.” See ibid.,
429.

61 Ibid., 439.

62 Ibid., 439.

63 Though the story seems to be saying that patriarchy (Morido) must be vanquished in
order for modern progress to be made, it is actually matriarchy that is killed off in the end
in the form of Hatano. See the next note, 64, for a further discussion.

64 Ibid., 441. Nakagami again uses the word 死っている to describe Hatano's dead body
as he did with Morido's prostrate form earlier. He does not gloss it with the reading
yokotawatte iru, but I assume that he intends it to be read the same way. There is no
relation between Hatano and Morido, either explicitly or implicitly in the text, so the only
possible correlation is to the mountain, the implication being that Hatano's death is, in a
sense, the death that will trigger the destruction of the mountain and the roji. It is also
worth mentioning that Sakura, a wealthy landowner, is described in feminine terms and
Hatano, also a wealthy landowner, has what would be conventionally considered more
masculine characteristics: she is assertive, forward, demanding, etc. However, she knows
everything about Toshihisa—she has known him since he was a child—and when she
calls him for something he immediately goes to her. This makes Toshihisa think of
himself as a child that clings to his mother (haha ni sugari-tsuku kodomo no yō datta),

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and, in fact, because she knows so much about him and has known him for so long, Hatano does take on an almost foster mother-like air, which makes their sexual relationship all the more disturbing. See Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 2, 439. More importantly, however, her death seems to trigger the fire that consumes the alley and the destruction of the remainder of Garyū, which takes place in “Wara no ie.” Earlier on in “Garyūsan,” the narrator tells us that Sakura and the other people buying up the land concessions are waiting for Morido to draw his last breath, a signal that they can then start demolishing the mountain and the roji. However, Morido’s death never comes, only Hatano’s does, thus what could have easily been another Oedipal story (with Morido as the father, as is hinted at in the text) turns into something else entirely, where the matriarchal figure must die for the “son” (i.e., Toshihisa) to be free.

65 Said, 124.


67 Doreen Massey makes some comments that have particular bearing on this passage: “It is interesting to note how frequently the characterization of place as home comes from those who have left, and it would be fascinating to explore how often this characterization is framed around those who—perforce—stayed behind; and how often the former was male, setting out to discover and change the world, and the latter female, most particularly a mother, assigned the role of personifying a place which did not change.” See Massey, 166-167. Many of Nakagami’s characters, especially those dealt with here, leave the roji while the women stay behind.

The Japanese is far more telling here: Takeshi wa sono roji ga moeru kaji o mitai mono da to sae omotta. Roji ni sashite yoi kioku wa nakatta no datta. The second sentence is clearly explaining that, because he has no “good” memories of the alley, he would like to see it burned down.

The lack of a name for the woman in the roji makes her seem generic and perhaps speaks to her symbolic nature as a signifier for maternity and, at the same time, an erotic symbol of difference.


Ibid., 451.

Ibid., 459-460.

Ibid., 460. Takeshi’s mother actually runs a horumon-yaki-ya-san, but “barbequed pig/beef entrails stand” hardly seems appetizing in English. Horumon is generally regarded as a stamina food that increases your energy if you consume it, and also is believed to have somewhat aphrodisiac effects.

Lefebvre, 143.

Grosz, 109.

Karatani, *Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji*, 159.

Cornyetz, 211.

Ibid., 211.


Malpas, 174.

Massey, 171.
Chapter 5 – Coming Full Circle: Space, Narrative, and the Next Roji

1 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 2, 422.

2 Nakagami also chronicles the destruction of the roji in Kumano-shū.

3 Karatani, Sakaguchi Ango to Nakagami Kenji, 199.

4 Yamaguchi, “Kingship, Theatricality, and Marginal Reality in Japan,” in Text and Context: The Social Anthropology of Tradition, ed. Ravindra K. Jain (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977), 165. Yamaguchi refers to the emperor system as a system of kingship. I believe Karatani locates the distinction between king and emperor in Yamaguchi’s work when he writes: “It was, in fact, only in the Taisho period, after the end of the Russo-Japanese War and Japan’s release from the international pressures it had faced since the last years of the Tokugawa shogunate, that the emperor system, in the sense that Yamaguchi has defined it, began to function in modernity.” See Karatani, Origins of Modern Japanese Literature, 166. For Yamaguchi kingship signifies the pre-modern and the emperor system the modern.


6 According to the Nihongi or Nihon shoki, Susano-o is the child of Izanami and Izanagi. The Nihongi reads, “Next they [Izanami and Izanagi] produced the leech-child, which
even at the age of three years could not stand upright … Their next child was Sosa no wo
no Mikoto.” (“Susa” is an acceptable derivation of “Sosa,” according to the translator of
this work, G.W. Aston.) See Nihongi, trans. G.W. Aston (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle
Company, 1972), 19. Also, when Izanami dies giving birth to the fire deity, Kagutsuchi
no Kami, Susano-o laments her death so deeply that he falls idle, crying and weeping,
and neglects to rule the world entrusted to him. This angers Izanagi, who demands to
know what is wrong. Susano-o replies that he wishes to join his mother in the
netherworld, which only irritates Izanagi even further. Izanagi then commands Susano-o
to leave immediately, if that is what he truly wants. The Kojiki, however, (and certain
alternate passages in the Nihongi) has it that Susano-o was born after Izanami died.
Izanagi, mourning her loss, travels to the netherworld to try and retrieve her, but, when he
glimpses how much she has decayed, he flees. Later, to cleanse himself from his
polluting visit to the land of the dead, he bathes himself. It is during this bathing (actually
when Izanagi is cleaning out his nose) that Izanagi gives birth to Susano-o. See Kojiki,
Kojiki and certain variations of the Nihongo, Izanagi orders Susano-o to govern over the
ocean. In main passage of the Nihongo, Izanagi is commanded to rule over the
netherworld (see Nihongo, 20), and in an alternate passage, he is entrusted with the world
of man (see Nihongo, 28). Regardless of the land he governs over, he refuses or neglects
his duty, and is exiled to the netherworld for his impetuous and/or destructive behavior.
Yamaguchi Masao mostly refers to the main passage of the Nihongo in structuring his
arguments.
This passage is also quoted earlier in Chapter 4, page 69, note 55: “Morido used to cry a lot. On days when it rained, the water level frequently rose and various places in the alley turned into a soggy mire…” (Morido wa yoku naita. Arne no hi, yoku mizu ga dete roji no soko-koko wa nukarunda). See Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 2, 426. The image of tears also has a parallel to the myth of Susano-o, who, in one version of his exile, is forced to don his straw coat and hat, and descend from heaven amidst a terrible rainstorm.

8 Nihongi, 19.

9 Nakagami, NKZ, Vol. 2, 422.

10 Ibid., 395.

11 Ibid., 396.

12 Ibid., 404. The passage continues: “The real Sakura possessed none of the sharp masculine characteristics [the rumors painted him to have]—in Toshihisa’s eyes Sakura had tone of voice like a woman who spoke as though possessed; he was a man who behaved in the smooth manner of a woman, gentle with his words.”

13 Ibid., 417.

14 Ibid., 455.

15 Ibid., 398.

16 Ibid., 404. These descriptions are perhaps the least problematic of the attitudes displayed towards women in Nakagami’s texts: in many of the scenes of sexual activity Nakagami depicts intense violence against women. Here, Toshihisa only comes across as a male chauvinist, but his attitudes are nevertheless disturbing. Further, I do not believe one can simply dismiss this misogynist attitude as an attack on the emperor system as
represented by Sakura; that strikes me as too easy. Stephen Dodd has written that
Nakagami’s writing shares “a not infrequent theme within mainstream men’s literature, at
least where the role of the female character seems mostly a means for the male figure to
work out his own problems.” See Dodd, 11. I agree with Dodd’s assessment that
Nakagami’s works “resist an ‘easy’ read,” and believe a further examination of such
attitudes should be pursued.

17 Yamaguchi, “Kingship, Theatricality, and Marginal Reality in Japan,” 162.

18 Sakura also believes that the “saddle” (kura) portion of the song comes from his family


20 Ibid., 403.

21 Ibid., 430.

22 Tomotsune, 221-222. Tomotsune does not italicize buraku.


24 Livia Monnet also states that the hijiri, which Nakagami frequently used in his setsuwa
texts, “were both an integral, indispensable part of village life/folk religion in medieval
Japan and awe-inspiring, polluted outsiders who were despised, shunned and kept out of
Thus, Nakagami’s hijiri, too, contains elements of the margin and the center.
Additionally, many of Nakagami’s characters take care of birds, which was also
considered a degrading occupation. See Price, “A History of the Outcaste: Untouchability


26 Nakagami, *NKZ*, Vol. 2, 430. Sakura refers, at the end of the passage, to the socialist movement active in the last decade of the Meiji Period and his uncle’s and father’s actions. The reference to the land being worth ten yen also recalls the three ten yen coins that Sakura places over the map of Komoriku at the start of “Garyūsan.”

27 Ibid., 405.

28 Ibid., 457-458.

29 Ibid., 449.

30 Ibid., 462.

31 This irony is primarily an indictment against the people of the roji (that is, the people of the buraku) who welcomed the land prospectors with open arms; Nakagami clearly did not look on the land prospectors with such friendly eyes.


33 Karatani, “Nakagami Kenji no sekai-sei,” 387.


35 Yomota and Yoshimoto, 211.

36 Ibid., 211.

**Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

1 Yomota and Yoshimoto, 209. Yomota, in the conversation with Yoshimoto, says:
As we know, since Hakai, various people—like Oguri Fuyō (1875-1926), Noma Hiroshi (1915-1991), and Sumi’i Sue (1902-1997)—have written about the problem of discrimination, but much of the literature has been written by presenting or expressing, as literature, this problem of discrimination, a problem which exists outside, in society. I believe that, no matter which side of discrimination you stand on—whether you discriminate or are discriminated against—the issue of discrimination exists even before you start to write, and all you can do when you write, is to reflect that [same discrimination] ... Nakagami was clearly different [from these writers] in that he believed discrimination existed within the basic act of writing literature, within the act of writing narrative; and in the fact that he stated all narrative, all melodrama, could only be created because discrimination existed.

2 Most acclaimed novel, that is, by Japanese critics.

3 Watanabe, Nakagami Kenji-ron: itoshisa ni tsuite, 27 and 138. The title Sennen no yuraku could also be translated Pleasure of a Thousand Years, but all English-language scholars that I have read render it as A Thousand Years of Pleasure.

4 Takazawa, Nakagami Kenji jiten, 129.

5 Lefebvre, 49.

6 Ibid., 52.

7 Karatani, Origins of Modern Japanese Literature, 163.

8 Asada, et al, 32.

9 Karatani, Origins of Modern Japanese Literature, 163.

10 Both Karatani and Yomota discuss the Oedipal struggle as the archetypal narrative of modernity in various texts. Yomota’s discussion in Kishu to tensei is frequently referenced. See Yomota, 181-229.

11 Ibid., 227.

12 Cornyetz, 168 and 170.

Moriyasu, *Nakagami Kenji-ron: Kumano, roji, gensō* (Tokyo: Kaihō Shuppansha, 2003), 80. Moriyasu’s argument actually pertains to *Misaki* and the comments of the Akutagawa Prize committee who criticized the work for its complicated relationships. Moriyasu states that, if the committee had read *Misaki* in line with Nakagami’s other, previous texts, they would not have felt the same way.

Tansman, 288.
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